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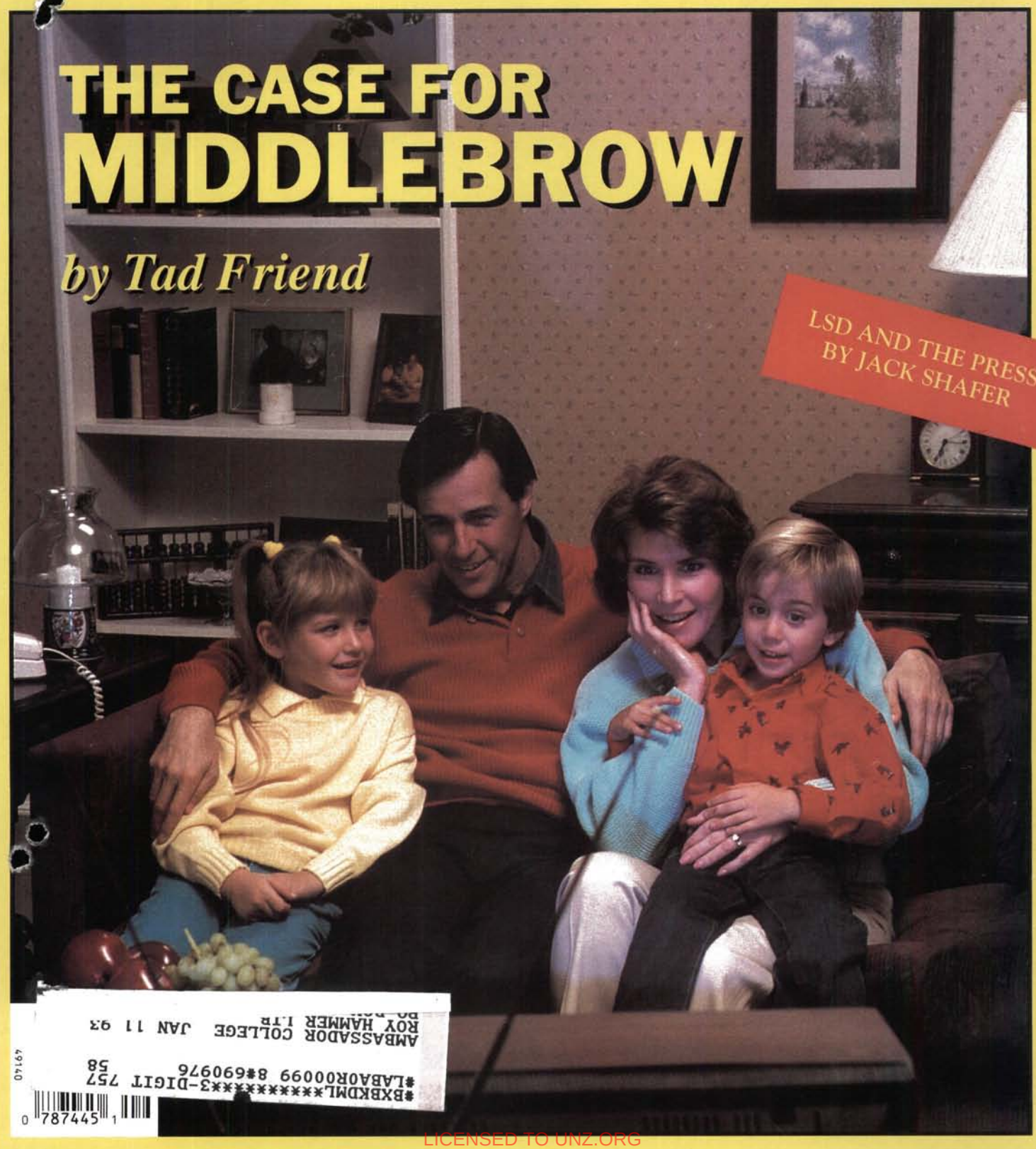

THE CASE FOR MIDDLEBROW

by Tad Friend

LSD AND THE PRESS
BY JACK SHAFER

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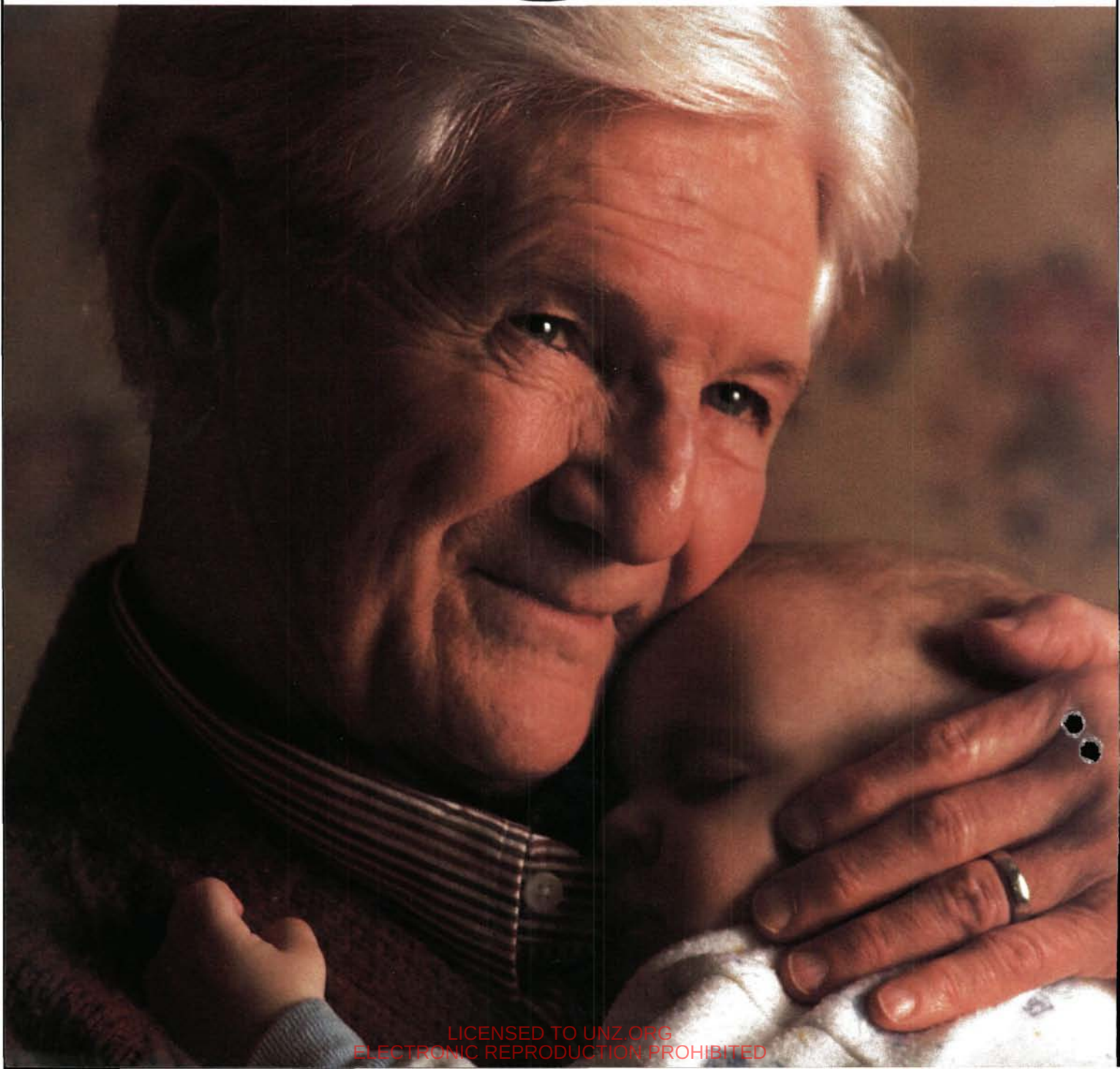

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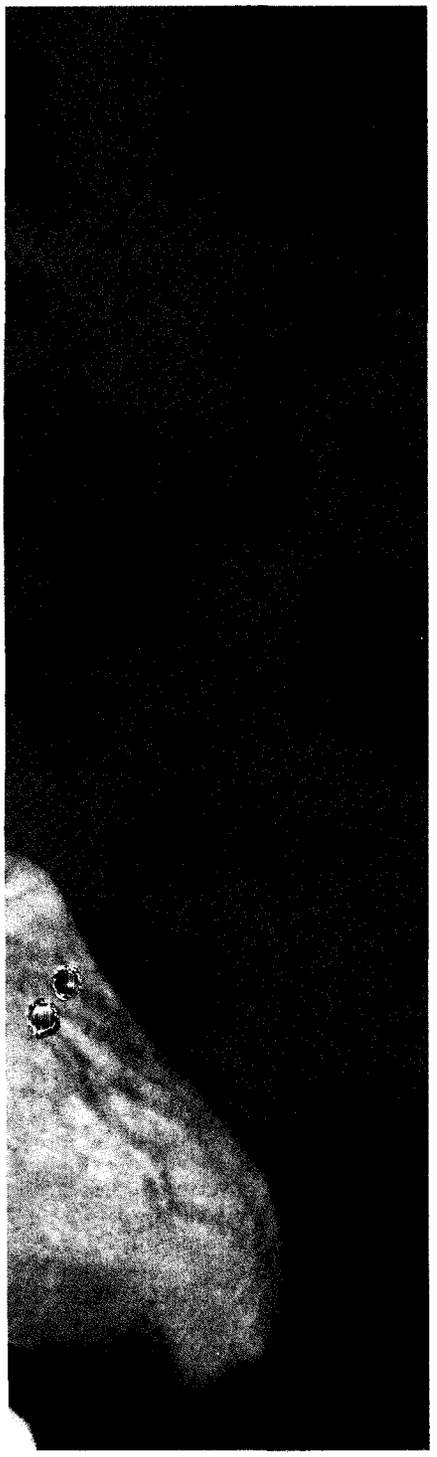

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FROM WASHINGTON

Quack

For an illustration of the difference between principled conservatism and empty politics, compare the health care reform proposal of the right-wing Heritage Foundation with President Bush's proposal, unveiled on February 6.

The Bush plan is clearly based on the Heritage idea. The heart of both proposals is the use of tax breaks to enable people to afford health insurance. The claim of both is that this will provide universal coverage without the heavy hand of government. But Bush merely notes that his plan will cost $35 billion a year and says he looks forward to working with Congress on how to pay for it. Heritage, by contrast, would pay for its tax credits by ending the tax deduction for employer-financed health insurance. As it happens, that tax benefit will cost the government $38 billion this year—enough for Bush's scheme and a bit to spare.

Fiscal dishonesty makes Bush's health care plan an almost comically accurate metaphor for the Republican stewardship of the past decade. But that is only half the problem. Ending the subsidy to employer-provided health care is central to Heritage's contention that its plan will control health care costs through market incentives. Bush makes the same claim, but without the crucial mechanism.

As Bush and other critics of the various more ambitious Democratic reform plans love to point out, most Americans (about 170 million) have adequate insurance coverage now through their employers, though they live in fear of losing it. The trouble with employer-financed coverage is that it isolates consumers from the cost of their health care decisions. Even if the employee pays part of the premium, there is no reward for economizing.

And even the Heritage Foundation recognizes that the free market cannot control costs under such conditions. So Heritage envisions a world where individuals are responsible for making their own health care arrangements, and for at least part of the cost of each decision they make. By contrast Bush—while eschewing direct government cost controls—would leave most consumers in health cost Fantasyland.

As noted before in this space (TRB, July 29, 1991), the Heritage proposal should have great appeal to principled liberals as well as principled conservatives. It would guarantee universal access to affordable health care. Indeed it would *require* everyone to own health insurance—something Bush's plan doesn't do because it doesn't really provide the means. And Heritage would finance its plan through what amounts to a progressive tax increase—better-paid people in higher tax brackets with more lavish health care benefits would shell out the most.

Heritage's belief that market forces alone can totally control the health cost spiral may belong more to the realm of theology than economics. But the Heritage plan certainly would be a vast improvement on current arrangements. And it has the Thatcherite conservative virtue of not leaving out the unpleasant bits. Bush's plan, by contrast, is pure Reaganism: all dessert, no spinach. (A provision to tax just part of the health benefits of those with incomes over $100,000 was dropped at the panicky insistence of House Republicans.)

The most the Bushies will say about paying for their plan is to suggest that much of the money can come from "capping" the cost of Medicare and Medicaid. This talk of "caps" is vague in the case of Medicare, but fairly specific regarding Medicaid—reasonably enough, since Medicare is for the politically powerful elderly, whereas Medicaid is merely for poor people.

Even for Medicaid, though, the proposed "cap" is not actual cost control. The federal government will simply give less money to the states, which administer and partly finance the program, and tell them: "You figure it out." The result might be superior health care delivered more efficiently, as the Bushies piously hope. Or state treasuries might get stuck with the difference. Or hospitals might shift costs onto those with private insurance. Or the poor might simply get less health care.

With this proposal, George Bush concedes the liberal principle that the government should guarantee every citizen's right to decent health care. But he does it with no grace. Instead, he attacks liberal alternatives to his own proposal as "socialized medicine." Years ago Ronald Reagan, as a paid flack for the American Medical Association, used this same phrase to attack Medicare—a program now so sacrosanct that neither Reagan nor Bush would dare to touch it. In contrast to the Democrats' "socialized medicine" with its bureaucratic rules, Bush says, his arrangement will "preserve choice."

Let's be honest. Like Bush, I prefer a market arrangement to the extent it can work. But any arrangement that works to control costs will do it by severely limiting consumer choice. Bush's own proposal repeatedly touts the merits of what it calls "coordinated care," the administration's preferred euphemism for "managed care," which is itself a euphemism for systems that restrict what doctor and hospital you may use, what treatment you get, and so on. Health maintenance organizations are the prime example. They can provide excellent and cost-effective health care. What they don't provide is free choice. That is exactly why they work.

And Bush's proposal is hardly free of the heavy hand of central government. Fortunately, it is not likely to be enacted until after his fatuous ninety-day freeze on government regulations, because it entails many new ones: regulations requiring the insurance industry not to discriminate against those with pre-existing ailments, regulations requiring employers to help their workers find insurance (though not to help pay for it), federal regulations forbidding the states to do this or that.

The rule requiring insurance companies to take all comers is a sleeper. It is needed to solve the problem of people who lose their insurance when they change or lose their jobs. But to make it work will inevitably involve the government in setting insurance rates, assigning people to different companies, and generally interfering in the free flow of market forces. The override of state regulations will speed the development of HMOs and help small employers to band together for greater efficiency. But it demonstrates once again that conservatives don't stand on ceremony about the principle of federalism when there's something they want done.

There are other good things in Bush's proposal. Who can object to more efforts to prevent people getting sick? All you can say about the suggestion to make sure all poor children get their shots is an exasperated, "About time." Bush's malpractice reforms are also needed, though he exaggerates their importance. His own report estimates the cost of malpractice (doctors' insurance premiums plus "defensive medicine") at $27 billion. That's just 3 percent of current health care costs—which increase that much every few months—and no reform is going to eliminate malpractice costs completely.

Genuine cost control—whether by the market or by the government—is a medicine Dr. Bush is unwilling to prescribe. We need a second opinion.

MICHAEL KINSLEY

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THE NEW REPUBLIC

A Weekly Journal of Opinion

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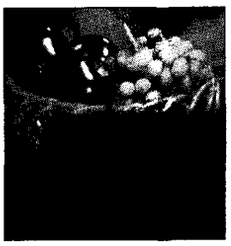

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CORRESPONDENCE

Greek to me

To the editors:

Mary Lefkowitz's "Not Out of Africa" (February 10) tellingly reveals a paradox in her thinking as serious as the paradox present in the Afrocentric myth she so decries. If Western civilization is the witless, graceless, quasi-barbaric product of "ice people," why are Afrocentrists so desperate to prove its African roots? Conversely, if the Greek classics are a timeless repository of wisdom, why would they be devalued if revealed to be less Greek or, to the point, in some way black ("if the Greeks and Romans and the people who teach about their civilization have all suppressed the truth ... I myself would agree that they should be eliminated")?

Lefkowitz's stringent insistence on the exclusion of a black influence, after frank admission of inconclusive evidence, is indication of an opposing bias as odious and ill-founded as that of Afrocentrism. She at one point even assumes to know the mind of Herodotus ("if that had been what Herodotus meant, he would have referred to them as Ethiopians") in order to denigrate the possibility of black influence on Greek culture. The disturbing question is not "How can she be so sure?" but "Why *must* she be so sure?"

Race, as the Greeks knew, is a notion. Regardless of their origin, the classics are important because they illuminate the foundations of Western (not white) society, and ours is a Western (not white) society. I agree wholeheartedly with Lefkowitz in one respect: biased and uninformed debate, whether to protect treasured cultural myths or in pursuit of a "noble lie," is beneath the dignity of the Greeks, whomever they may have been.

LEO S. MACKAY JR.
Cambridge, Massachusetts

To the editors:

Mary Lefkowitz states that because Socrates was an Athenian citizen he must have had Athenian parents. She also states that foreigners could not become naturalized Athenian citizens.

The law limiting Athenian citizenship to persons whose parents were Athenian citizens was adopted in 450-1 B.C., when Socrates would have been about 20 years of age. Prior to that time there are records of Athenians whose mothers were of foreign birth. Is it entirely impossible that a well-to-do resident alien family, of African or other origin, could have married their daughter into a citizen family, especially if the bride had a substantial dowry? Do we know enough Athenian constitutional law to say that such a family itself might not have been put on the citizenship rolls in the upheavals of the sixth century B.C.?

EUGENE M. MITCHELL
Farmington Hills, Michigan

Mary Lefkowitz replies:

Of course it would have been possible that well-to-do resident aliens might have married their daughter to a native Athenian sometime before the formal citizenship law was passed. But given the Athenians' (and other Greeks') awareness of foreigners (*barbaroi*) in their midst, it's not likely that the comic poets would have passed up a chance to tease Socrates for being an "Ethiopian."

Democratic couplets

To the editors:

The editors ("Sex and the Candidate," February 3) rightly attribute the campaign chant "Ma, Ma, where's my Pa?" to Republicans eager to highlight Grover Cleveland's fathering of a child out of wedlock. The latter half of that chant ("Gone to the White House, Ha, ha, ha"), however, was the victorious Democrats' postelection rejoinder.

To be sure, the 1884 election was not devoid of Democratic couplets. Here's my favorite:

> We'll shout for our man and his important appendix!
> We'll whoop'er up lively for Cleveland and Hendricks!

MICHAEL NELSON
Memphis, Tennessee

Publishers' clearinghouse

To the editors:

We at Mystery Books, a small specialty bookstore, very much appreciated Tony Rothman's "Reader Rip-Off" (February 3). We have found that it is not economically sensible to carry new hardbacks because most of our customers just look at the price and tell us that they'll read something else until the title they want comes out in paperback. (And we are located on Philadelphia's Main Line, a suburb known primarily for the wealthiness of its residents.)

However, there is an aspect of the book business of which Rothman was not aware. He doesn't understand the purpose of book distributors. Book distributors make bookselling a viable business by protecting beleaguered bookstores from an appalling array of inefficiencies created by book publishers. When we first opened, and before we had enough experience to know better, we decided to order fifty copies of a particular title from a reputable publisher. We called for instructions and were told we needed to send in a written order. We were told faxing the order would be fine because the fax machine was right near the order-taker's office. So someone in my office faxed them the order. A few hours later we received a call saying they had not received the fax. So we faxed it again. A few hours later we received another call saying they had not yet gotten our fax. This time I faxed it myself, carefully noting that the telephone number on the screen was correct and that the number of pages received was the number we sent. A few hours later we got a third telephone call. This time I took the call and said that they had so gotten the fax because I did it myself and checked the telephone number and pages received. Shortly after that, we got a fourth telephone call from the same person, this time to tell us that they had received all three faxes and to ask if we wanted one order or all three.

So don't tell me about pushing a button and having the book arrive electronically, because I tell you that you are talking about book publishers, and, without the book distributors, Americans might just as well be illiterate for all the books that will be available to them.

NORMA R. FRANK
Ardmore, Pennsylvania

Square one

To the editors:

What does Sidney Blumenthal mean by the phrase "circle-squaring," which he uses several times in "The Anointed" (February 3)? Does he think that circle-squaring is some kind of magical alchemy akin to turning gold into lead (a circle being more elegant than a square)? Does he mean that Bill Clinton is wasting his time in a futile attempt to do an impossible task? Or, that he has completed an apparently impossible task by bending the rules, i.e., cheating? Or is Blumenthal just mixing a metaphor that he does not understand?

The consensus of a set of my colleagues in mathematics over coffee a few days ago was the last. To square a circle means to construct a square enclosing the same area as the given circle. In the classical problem, the square is to be constructed geometrically using only a compass and an unmarked straightedge. This is one of the three great geometrical problems of antiquity (the

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other two being the trisection of an angle and the duplication of a cube).

In 1882 the German mathematician Ferdinand Lindemann established that a circle *cannot* be squared by the prescribed geometric methods when he proved that the number pi is a transcendental number, i.e., it is not the root of any polynomial equation with integer coefficients. Long after everyone will have forgotten who won this year's Super Bowl, Lindemann will be remembered for solving a problem that had thwarted mathematicians for centuries.

On the other hand, if we bend the rules, allowing non-geometric methods, then any high school student with a good knowledge of elementary algebra and plane geometry can write an algebraic circle-squaring formula.

In other words, circle-squaring cannot be done if you obey the rules, but it is easy if you cheat.

LYLE E. PURSELL
Rolla, Missouri

The writer is professor emeritus of mathematics at the University of Missouri at Rolla.

Trailing on...

To the editors:

The description of Anita Hill ("Dirt Trail," January 6 & 13) as a "prim Oklahoma Republican" is in error. Prim and Oklahoman she may be. But Hill is not a Republican. According to records at the Cleveland County Courthouse in Norman, Oklahoma, Anita Faye Hill registered as a Democrat on October 4, 1991, two days before she became a household word. The records reflect that Hill was previously registered as a Democrat in Tulsa County as well.

S. M. MATTHEWS JR.
Norman, Oklahoma

Kinderlaw

To the editors:

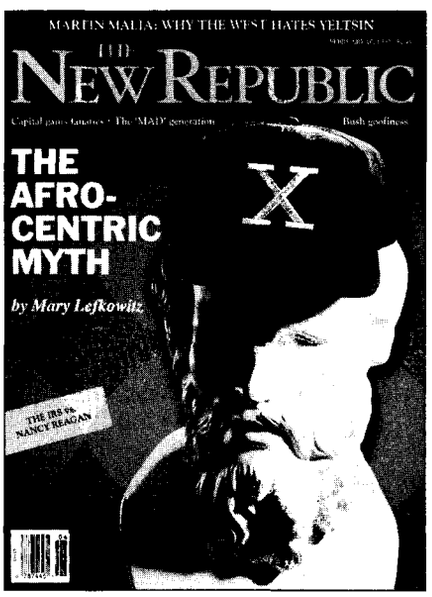
Regarding Andrew Bates's "Golden Girls" (February 3): I decided the time had come to retire from the practice of law when I was told at an "elder law" seminar last year that I could be sued for malpractice by the children of a deceased client whom I'd counseled to use her assets to pay for her care in a rest home rather than spend down to qualify for Medicaid.

The world has come to a sorry pass when advising a client to use her money to pay her bills rather than turning it over to her kids is actionable as a matter of law. The fact that you can do something legally doesn't automatically make it moral or ethical.

Ohio used to take a lien on the homes of elderly people who qualified for public assistance. The realty was sold upon their death, and the state recovered its outlay at that time. The heirs had the option, of course, of paying off the lien and keeping the home, and they frequently did so if the amount involved was reasonable vis-à-vis the value of the property.

It's the sort of thing the federal government should be doing *at the minimum* to put a stop to this outrageous ripoff of the taxpayers by people who can well afford to pay their own way—even though that may leave little or nothing for their heirs. So be it. The loss should fall on their kids, not the rest of us.

You can take out Long Term Care insurance to protect yourself against such loss. We've done so and told our



kids that they'll have to pay the premiums if the day ever comes that we can't do so and they want to make sure there's anything left for them at the time of our deaths.

HENRY E. YOUNG
Norwalk, Ohio

Sheila-na-gig

To the editors:

What's so funny, or maybe offensive in your eyes, about that stylish condom package you poked fun at in the February 10 Notebook? I have no idea what "Umoja Sasa" means, but the graphics are inspired and the idea of protecting blood from HIV also completely laudable. It sure beats the misty-focus, greeting card kitsch of most condom packages, which show a blond woman handing flowers to a boring '50s-looking dad-type guy. And the name, whatever it means, is a lot better than the macho Trojans or Sheikhs, or even the gender-neutral Lifestyles (my brand, because they're cheap). If Umoja Sasas ever appear in the Kroger I shop at, I'll buy them. At least until there's a condom called Eirinn that has leprechauns, Druids, and/or a Sheila-na-gig on it. (Know what a Sheila-na-gig is?)

Aesthetic considerations aside, anything that makes condoms more appealing to young black folks, hard hit as they are by AIDS and pregnancies, can't be anything but good.

SHANNON STONEY
Cookeville, Tennessee

Summonsed

To the editors:

The quality of life in New York is not low because the police cannot fill out their own summonses ("Quality of Life," January 6 & 13). It is low because Jim Holt's friend, Mr. X, who is probably from New Jersey, uses our parks to indulge his noisome habit. It is low because Mr. X and his Wall Street colleagues are as unhampered by the law at work as they are at play. Furthermore, the car that Mr. X parked in Manhattan turned its alarm on six times during the night, lowering the quality of life for all New Yorkers within earshot.

EVE JOCHNOWITZ
New York, New York

Firing line

To the editors:

I picked up your magazine, for the first time, in my college library today and read Douglas G. McGrath's article from a Secret Service agent's diary about President Bush's trip to Japan ("The Shrub File," February 10). You have obviously excerpted only those parts of the diary that are embarrassing to the president and our domestic automobile industry, and twisted a public-spirited attempt by the president to do some good for our country into a shameful bit of propaganda for the Democrats. I don't know where you found this "Agent Duke," but I think his real name should be revealed and that he should be fired from the president's entourage for his duplicity.

ALAN STEWART
Sacramento, California

The editors welcome correspondence from readers. Letters should include the writer's full name, address, and telephone number; be typed double-spaced; and be held to under 200 words. Letters may be edited for space. Please address letters to: Correspondence, TNR, 1220 19th Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.

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Must *The Concord Review* Fold?

BY ALBERT SHANKER, PRESIDENT OF THE AMERICAN FEDERATION OF TEACHERS

Usually when I write this column, I'm trying to convince thousands of people about something. This time, I'm trying to reach one or two people. I don't even know who they are, but they'll have to be people receptive to spending some money on a good cause. Here's the story.

Over the past several years, I've looked forward to seeing a quarterly history journal called *The Concord Review* come across my desk. The articles are a pleasure to read; they're fresh, lively, well-researched and sometimes elegant. Their range is impressive. Among the essays I've found most interesting were ones on the Pullman strike of 1894; on Lillie A. James, an African-American woman who pioneered education for African-Americans in Pensacola, Florida; and on George W.G. Ferris, the inventor of the Ferris wheel, which he meant to be an American answer to the Eiffel Tower. If you just picked it up and started reading, you'd never know the most extraordinary thing about *The Concord Review*—that all the essays are the work of precollege students.

Teachers from all over the world have sent student essays and money for subscriptions.

Editor Will Fitzhugh quit teaching and founded the journal five years ago. He was impressed by the essays some of his own students produced, and he became convinced that there must be lots of other terrific history essays out there. Why not recognize, and encourage, excellence by publishing some of them? The results have been wonderful. The essays come from both public and private school students, and they exemplify the level kids can achieve when they are interested in what they are doing and encouraged to pursue it.

The *Review* has won plenty of friends and admirers among people who are concerned about raising the standards of achievement in American education: Diane Ravitch, noted historian and assistant secretary in the U.S. Department of Education; Chester Finn, a former assistant secretary of education; Harold Howe, a former U.S. Commissioner of Education; James Freedman, president of Dartmouth College; and Theodore Sizer, founder of the Coalition of Essential Schools, have all written in its support. I wrote an earlier column myself.

People in the front lines have been enthusiastic, too. Teachers from all over the world have sent student essays and money for subscriptions. And a commercial publisher has chosen four essays that appeared in the *Review* for a series on writing directed to secondary school students. One of Fitzhugh's favorite testimonials is from an official of a foundation that didn't offer the *Review* any financial support. Apparently, the man picked up a copy to glance at one essay and ended up reading the entire 150-page issue.

But praise doesn't pay the bills. The *Review* now has subscribers in 44 states and 15 foreign countries but nowhere near the number needed to make it self-supporting. This is no surprise. Fitzhugh, who has financed the journal largely with his own money, has never had the funds to promote it properly. And, as he points out, even *Sports Illustrated*, a magazine with mass-market appeal and a yearly swimsuit issue, took 10 years to break even. Unfortunately, he's now at the point where he will have to close down operations in March—unless he can find the corporate or foundation support that has so far eluded him.

What's the problem? Fitzhugh says some people have suggested that excellence of the kind he is trying to encourage is elitist. In other words, the standard *The Concord Review* sets is too high for most kids. I don't think that's true. Jaime Escalante has shown us that expecting more of kids means you get more. This is as much the case with history as it is with math. If we encouraged students to raise their sights, many of them could measure up to the standards set by the *Review*; many more would enjoy reading essays written by other students and discussing them in class. And working with the journal would inspire everyone to do better—just the way watching a good runner inspires kids to go out and do their best. Even if they have no hope of beating his record, they can try to break their own.

Or maybe the problem is that *The Concord Review* is ahead of its time. It's a new idea so it doesn't fit into the categories and priorities that foundations have identified. Fitzhugh says that when a foundation turns him down, that's often what they tell him.

Something like this happened when he applied to the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH). This federally funded agency is interested in history and it's interested in raising standards. It also funds summer seminars for teachers. But NEH can't consider Fitzhugh for a grant because he isn't a teacher; they don't fund student projects; and they don't fund publications. In other words, *The Concord Review* falls through the cracks. And that, more or less, is the story with every foundation or agency Fitzhugh has applied to.

Will Fitzhugh needs $150,000 a year and some time to build on the solid base he has already laid. There must be one or two people or a business or a foundation that can bend its guidelines so that this extraordinary publication won't disappear.

To contact Will Fitzhugh, write to P.O. Box 661, Concord, Mass. 01742 or call 508-443-0022.

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THE NEW REPUBLIC

MARCH 2, 1992

A THOUSAND CUTS

Since the days of his presidential candidacy four years ago, George Bush has been a sworn enemy of tax reform. As of October 1988 he was promising, among other things, a tax credit of $1,000 per child, new tax breaks for oil and gas, breaks for rural development, tax-free college savings bonds, deferred taxes on $1,000 in savings every year, and a reduction in the capital gains tax rate to 15 percent. Make a few minor adjustments—change oil and gas to real estate, change the $1,000 children's credit to a $500 exemption, change 15 percent to 15.4 percent—and you are looking at the president's emergency anti-recession economic rescue plan. Apparently the same giveaways that made sense at the height of the expansion are suited to the doldrums as well.

True, from a purely macroeconomic point of view tax giveaways make somewhat more sense when the economy is stalled than when it's running hot. But they still don't make much sense. Once you get into the business of giving out tax breaks in order to micromanage the economy, the temptation to open a loophole for every cause that seems worthy quickly becomes irresistible. Before you know it, the tax code is a Swiss cheese and it's being denounced (by President Carter) as "a disgrace to the human race." Until the 1986 tax reform act, there were so many shelters that people with $100,000 incomes were actually paying only half the official 50 percent marginal tax rate. All those loopholes engendered resentment and acted as a welfare system for tax lawyers. Even worse, they worked at cross purposes with each other and misallocated resources. Thank the old tax code's real estate subsidies for the empty office buildings that are now crushing the banking system.

Tax reform was the finest achievement of President Reagan's second term. Alas, Reagan's former vice president still doesn't get it. Indeed, Bush's tax proposals are a case study in policy incoherence. Because the economy is slow, the president wants to stimulate consumption. Because low investment hampers longer-term growth, the president wants to stimulate investment. For most purposes, those are conflicting goals. So which does Mr. Bush pursue? Both. On the one hand, he tries to stimulate spending by giving out tax credits to families and homebuyers; he would let people spend their tax-deferred IRA accounts on homes, medical care, or school, thus defeating the whole (pro-saving) purpose of IRAs. On the other hand, he tries to stimulate investment by reducing the capital gains tax and giving out investment tax breaks. Net result: trivial economic stimulus, higher deficits (which really *do* reduce investment), and an invitation to Congress to begin rebuilding the pre-1986 tax code from hell.

One other thing: changing the tax rules every year imposes costs of its own. It adds uncertainty to investment decisions and tempts people to play timing games. The tax code, like the farm programs, should be left alone for five years at a stretch. It shouldn't be messed with, except to make genuinely substantial, and very occasional, reforms.

President Reagan's fiscal downside was Reaganomics: borrow and borrow, spend and spend. His upside was tax reform. Bush's economic prescription is Reagan's downside without the advantages. And make no mistakes: it's Reaganomics. Bush wants to cut various and sundry taxes. To pay for the tax cuts, he proposes a grab bag of spending cuts and freezes. Some of those reductions aren't gimmicks, but few or none will be enacted, any more than Bush's last election-year spending freeze was. (Remember the 1988 "flexible freeze"?) So, just like Reagan, Bush would offset his tax cuts with spending reductions—not. Borrow and borrow, spend and spend. •

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NOTEBOOK

BUSHISM OF THE WEEK: "So far it did not reverberate in the negative there. The signature is being checked through the master computer, which is located someplace else, and we'll get an answer back after we leave." —February 4, on writing a check at a supermarket in Orlando, Florida

BUSHISM OF THE WEEK NOT UTTERED BY BUSH: "The reason I say the hockey spot is a mistake is I believe in examining the truth. And the truth is, the hockey spot drove my numbers down and not up." —Bob Kerrey, in the February 10 issue of *Newsweek*, on his recent soul-searching

RHODES-RUNNER: In all the explanations of Bill Clinton's troubles, there has been no mention of the Rhodes scholar connection. Not only is Clinton a Rhodes scholar, but so are his deputy campaign manager, George Stephanapoulos, one of his key speechwriters, Bruce Reed, confidant Bill Halter, economic aide Ira Magaziner, and economic adviser (and TNR contributing editor) Robert B. Reich, whom, legend has it, Clinton actually met on the boat over to Oxford. There's nothing excessively damning about all this, of course; but then there's nothing excessively anything about Rhodes scholars. In general, their primary traits are a desire to please, a preternatural desire to bloat their résumés, and a stunning inability to make it all the way to the top. Their highest political achiever so far has been House Speaker Carl Albert. So far, Bill Clinton is playing to form. Our advice if he survives the primaries: don't pick *echt*-Rhodie Bill Bradley to be your running mate.

CHARITY BEGINS:

Americans finding compassion for those less fortunate

—*San Jose Mercury News*, January 20

Apathy Is Seen Toward Agony Of the Homeless

—*The New York Times*, same day

(thanks to Andrea Ball, Cupertino, California)

BLUE GENE: Twenty-four years ago in New Hampshire Eugene McCarthy ran in the Democratic primary against an incumbent president. Within six weeks Lyndon Johnson had taken himself out of the race, and the rest is history. McCarthy is on the ballot in New Hampshire again, once more making the kind of complicated arguments that Paul Tsongas is lauded for. But the party has treated McCarthy shabbily, not permitting him to speak at many of its forums. The savvy say he can't win, an alibi that might be used against Jerry Brown or Bob Kerrey just as well. A more disturbing comparison is with George McGovern's 1984 return to New Hampshire. McGovern was the biggest loser of all time, having led the Democrats to their greatest debacle, a banal, platitudinous man who was yet conscientiously covered and anointed "conscience of the party." McCarthy—far more reflective, literate, and witty than any other candidate—has never aspired to be anyone's conscience. What he has done is to talk sense to the American people, and talk starkly to them, as well. Maybe that's his problem. And his party's. •

TOKYO POSTCARD

CHOCOLATE KISSES

By Marjorie Sun

The Japanese may not buy many American cars, but they do embrace much of American culture, sometimes with an odd twist. Take American holidays. Japanese celebrate Valentine's Day, but they've come up with their own version. In the downtown Ginza area at lunchtime, department stores are doing a brisk business selling box after box of exquisitely wrapped chocolates. But there's something different about the scene. The candy buyers are all women. In Japan women are expected to give men chocolates.

In this hierarchical culture, there is, of course, a social structure to giving chocolates on Valentine's Day. Office ladies, known as OLs in Japanese, are supposed to spend a couple of bucks on *giri chocos*—obligation chocolates—for their bosses. Candy makers aren't crass enough to label giri chocos as such. But if a boss gets a small box with just a couple of sweet bits inside, it's hard to mistake the message. One young, female government official says, "If a man doesn't get at least some chocolate on Valentine's, he's really unpopular." OLs don't have to give chocolates, but the men in their office "will be discouraged" if they don't, a young Japanese woman explains. In some offices, so that everyone saves face, OLs pool their resources and set out one big box of candy for their male colleagues.

At the other end of the Valentine gift-giving spectrum is *honmei*, or "true feeling" gifts. If a woman has the hots for someone, she lets him know by giving *honmei* chocolates. Japanese candy makers embellish boxes of choco-

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lates with saccharine messages in Japlish that would make a Hallmark copy writer blush. "Blight Salon: The winds of happiness seem to gather around my shoulders." "Prince Valiant, All my heart went into this." "The Day You Were Born the Gods Must Have Gotten Together."

Women buy other pricey presents to woo their true loves. During the late 1980s, when the prices of stock and real estate went sky high, many a young woman spent $300 or $400 to woo her man. But times are tighter now, so most are scaling back, according to Tokyo retail analysts. This year, to send an unmistakable message of love a woman will offer the target of her affection homemade confections. February issues of young women's magazines are chock-full of recipes for sweets.

Guys don't get off the hook entirely. Male reciprocity comes a month later on "White-o Day," a holiday dreamed up by Japanese candy makers. On March 14 men whose hearts have been won by *honmei* overtures are supposed to respond by giving white chocolate or other presents with a white theme, such as white roses. And if the guys are really classy, they're expected to spend two to three times more on gifts than the women did. In a nation where men outnumber women, a lot of guys are jumping at the chance to please. Women wait with baited breath for White-o Day. Does he or doesn't he?

Since chocolate isn't a traditional Japanese food, you might expect foreign chocolates such as Godiva or other confections to have captured the domestic market. Not so. Imported candy is subject to tariffs, just as beef and citrus are. In 1989 the Japanese government dropped the 20 percent tariff on chocolate to 10 percent. That should have helped boost foreign sales. But Japanese candy makers came up with an easy way to maintain their market share, according to Toshiko Binder, a food market analyst at Jardine Fleming in Tokyo. Domestic companies began labeling many of their candy packages with a production date, which foreign companies usually don't do. They usually ship their products by sea, because chocolate keeps for months under proper inventory conditions. The sea shipments, however, take weeks to arrive. Ever fussy Japanese consumers opt for domestic candy because it's fresher, though not necessarily any tastier. At the same time, Binder says, some Japanese companies came up with a successful new technique to make chocolates hard on the outside, soft on the inside, and layered too. As a result, foreign chocolatiers have managed to capture only 10 percent of the Japanese market.

Valentine's Day is not the only weird permutation on Western holidays in Japan. Christmas Eve, December 24, is the day for the Big Date: Japanese male yuppies wine and dine women and take them to fancy hotels for the night. Just as men lose face if they don't get chocos on Valentine's Day, young women bring shame upon themselves if they're not asked out on the night before Christmas. Last Christmas Eve Omote-Sando, a chic boulevard in downtown Tokyo, was crowded with hip young couples. Men dressed in Armani-cut suits strolled arm-in-arm with women teetering in very high heels and clutching huge bouquets. Christmas Eve is so popular that men book the city's best hotels a year in advance—even though they may not know if they'll land a date. (The Hilton next to Tokyo's Disneyland is a favorite spot.) Recently hotels began requiring customers to pay cash up front for a reservation.

Japan also celebrates Halloween. But here it's mainly a day of giving gifts of candy to grown-ups and children, not trick-or-treating. One Japanese mother who lived in the States for three years tried unsuccessfully to convince her middle-class neighbors in Yokohama that children should go door-to-door trick-or-treating. In a nation where the crime rate is low, the response was curious: "Too dangerous," they said. Young Westerners try to maintain the American tradition, however. They don costumes and pack into one of the cars of the main train that circles the city, much to the amusement of natives.

Japan hasn't adopted Thanksgiving yet. But some Japanese do eat raw chicken. Is turkey sushi around the corner?

MARJORIE SUN is a correspondent for National Public Radio in Tokyo.

The Sun-man cometh to Harvard.

DR. UNCOOL J

By Brian Hecht

CAMBRIDGE

The floor seats of Harvard's Sanders Theatre were populated—save one or two—exclusively by black students. The risers were overwhelmingly white. The vast majority of whites sat in utter silence for three long hours on February 5 as large numbers of their black classmates enthusiastically clapped and cheered. The object of their approval was City College Professor Leonard Jeffries.

Jeffries is the notorious exponent of a theory that a conspiracy of whites—particularly Jews—has planned and plotted to oppress black people and rob them of their history and humanity. He has spoken of sun people, ice people, and the "melanin factor." Last month, after hearing accusations that Jeffries had threatened the life of a *Harvard Crimson* student reporter who had interviewed him, City College announced that Jeffries would be asked to resign as chairman of the Afro-American Studies Department.

Harvard's Black Students' Association, which sponsored the event, decided to invite him nevertheless, arguing that they want to hear from anyone with something relevant to say about black culture or history. BSA President Art Hall prefaced the speech by saying that the

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group's invitation to Jeffries did not constitute an endorsement of his ideas. But the endorsement came soon enough, as Jeffries unleashed hateful allegations and scores of Harvard students showered him with applause.

Harvard students turned out en masse to hear Dr. J (as he likes to be called). Eight hundred and fifty of them paid $2 to see him, some coming directly from an anti-Jeffries demonstration in the subfreezing cold. The BSA laid the ground rules: floor seats for club members only and no professional reporters. (I was able to smuggle in a microrecorder by virtue of my student identification.) All in the name of open debate.

After demanding that the audience address him with the African greeting "Hotep" and pouring water all over the floor in a libation to his African ancestors, Jeffries began in earnest. At first he spoke in measured tones, cracking a few jokes and trying hard to sound reasonable. Predictably, he began arguing for the exclusively African origins of society—cultural and biological. Such theories are rejected by all but a small circle of Afrocentric scholars, and should not be confused with the more reasonable demands to investigate African contributions to a classical society that knew many sources.

But soon enough the idiocy began. The key to understanding the African roots of society and overcoming "racial pathology," he claimed, is the ability to use the Leonard Jeffries "pyramid" method of critical thinking. A dozen times during his lecture, Jeffries held up a magic-marker drawing of a pyramid. The three corners, he claims, represent "thesis, antithesis, and synthesis." Sometimes the pyramid represented a dichotomy yielding a resolution (African life, African death, African life after death). He also used the pyramid to explain how Harry Cohn beat out his brother Jack to gain control of Columbia Studios in the 1930s, all with the help of Johnny Rosselli, "who they have just published a book on called *All-American Mafioso.*"

Jeffries described documentary proof in terms of thickness (as in, "I have documents *this thick!*") and cites among his scholarly sources cover illustrations in *Newsweek.* He constantly focused on Jews as perpetrators of the slave trade, as purveyors of negative black stereotypes in the film industry. He asked a member of the audience if he ever visited the two Amsterdam synagogues that are now museums containing documents about the slave trade. When the student tried to present statistics on how few Jews were actually involved in the slave trade, Jeffries began to lose it: "This is not a forum to get into these details!" he barked back.

In fact, Jeffries dismissed all charges of anti-Semitism outright. Why? "It's not in our self-interest to attack Jews, to become a focus of anti-Semitism." Jeffries backed up this defense with the following mantra: "It's not about anti-Semitism! It's about anti-*Kemetism!*"—which he defined as "the inability to deal with the blackness of the Nile."

One student asked Jeffries about similarities between his methodologies and Hitler's. Jeffries shouted back: "Adolf Hitler was the problem of Europeans! Adolf Hitler was the product of white supremacists. Adolf Hitler is not my problem! I have to worry about white folks in America!" Dozens of members of the audience responded with thunderous applause. Another asked Jeffries to be more specific in his allegations about the Jewish Hollywood conspiracy. Jeffries held up a portrait of black-faced Al Jolson and demanded of the student: "Do you feel any pain at all? Or do you only feel the pain of the Holocaust involving the Jews?"

Naturally, a large portion of the student body—black and white—was outraged by Jeffries, both before and after his appearance. But even that outrage was dampened by a squeamishness about criticizing the students who invited him, lending him the legitimacy of a Harvard imprimatur. Hillel—the Jewish student group—organized a multiethnic coalition to protest Jeffries with the proviso that there be no criticism of the BSA at the demo. Roger Fisher, the negotiating expert called in to moderate the event, thanked Jeffries at the end and gushed about how he was reminded of a speech by Malcolm X. From Harvard administrators, there was a collective shrug.

It is disappointing, but perhaps not surprising, that Harvard was mau-maued into taking the Jeffries speech so lightly. What is shocking is how many Harvard students tried to separate the man from his message. One classmate told me that although he disagreed with much of what Jeffries said, Jeffries was right about certain things, and that we should be careful about passing judgment on the students for taking pride in those things. As I walked out of Sanders Theatre that evening, a friend facetiously asked me whether I thought race relations at Harvard had been set back twenty years or thirty years. Twenty or thirty years ago, I thought to myself, this would never have happened.

BRIAN HECHT is a former TNR reporter-researcher.

The ballad of Tammy Wynette.

STAND BY YOUR MEN

By Alex Heard

> "Tammy [Wynette]'s music faithfully follows the notion that country music is poor folk's psychiatry ... a salve for the beleaguered housewife who grits her teeth as destiny dumps its slops on her head." —"Songs of Non-Liberation," *Newsweek,* August 2, 1971

Those were *Newsweek*'s words, not Hillary Clinton's. But a similar sentiment expressed by the wife of Arkansas Governor Bill Clinton was enough to inspire Wynette to write the now-famous screed she sent to many news organizations after Mrs. Clinton said, in her "60 Minutes" "duet" with Bill, "You know, I'm not sitting

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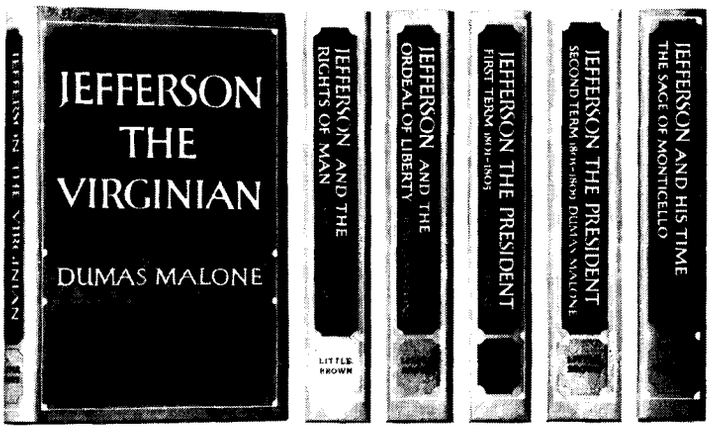

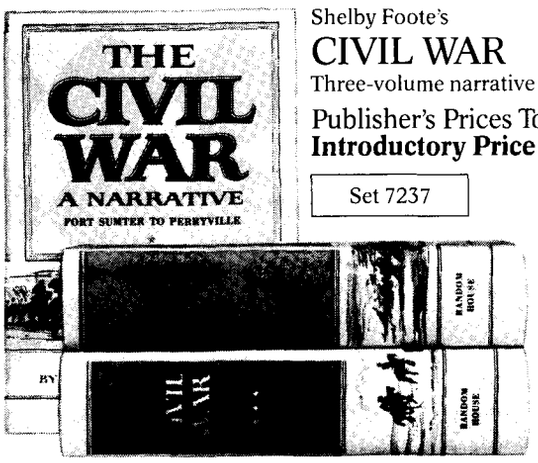

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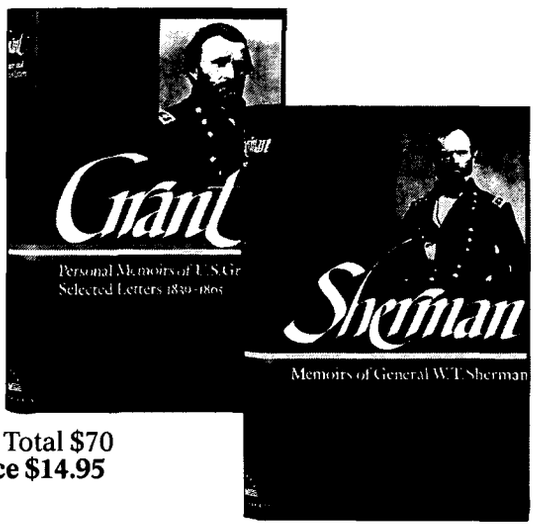

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here like some little woman, standing by my man like Tammy Wynette." Wynette's point was that her biggest hit, 1968's "Stand By Your Man," was not designed to teach that a "good" woman should stand by mutely while her husband slithers in and out of the house to drink, lie, and cheat; it was designed to honor reasonable loyalty to a man facing life's struggle. Intuiting, shaman-like, that her following was mortified by the insult, she thundered that Clinton had offended "all 'little women' in the country who 'stand by their man' and are potential supporters of Governor Clinton. How dare you!"

Who was right? What *was* the encoded message of "Stand By Your Man"? Adopting an objective New Criticism approach and focusing only on the text doesn't work—it can be read either way. But if you look at the bio behind the song, you gain insight.

Professionally, the main man Wynette stood by was her producer, Billy Sherrill. As she writes in her 1979 autobiography, *Stand By Your Man*, her goals were success, fame, and cash, and, to those ends, she put her faith in Sherrill's marketing and songwriting talents. "I have so much confidence in his taste and judgment that I'd record 'Yankee Doodle' if he asked me to," she writes. Indeed. And when it counted—the late 1960s, when redneck domestic feudalism was still rampant throughout the South, when women there desperately *needed* Wynette to flap semaphore flags that spelled out Views They Could Use—she carelessly issued a syrupy anthem to obedience.

"Billy Sherrill and I wrote [it] in about fifteen minutes one afternoon before a recording session," she says in *SBYM*. When "Stand By Your Man" was released, it drew fire from many feminists who interpreted it as a knee-jerk reaction to their beliefs. Wynette rejects this reading in *SBYM*. She even claims proto-fem status because she made it in the chauvinistic country-music business without lying down for any potbellied record execs. She deserves credit for that, but the overall claim won't wash. After making it big, she happily became the type of Bewigged, Sequined & Pampered Songbird that Robert Altman skewered in *Nashville*. Wynette was pleased to tell interviewers all about her counter-countercultural values. "Basically, country people don't think about protesting ... I have no desire to be freer than I am," she told *Newsweek*.

Funny, because at that moment she needed a release from bondage, as well as a crash course in relationship management. At this point in her life she had already been through two bad marriages and was in the midst of a third. (She's now happily married to George Richey, a songwriter.) The former Virginia Wynette Pugh had, at age 17, married a Mississippian named Euple Byrd, who, she says, turned out to be lazy, boring, and good at only one thing: insemination. She fled him in 1966—with three kids in tow—to "make it" in Nashville. There, along with her mentor Sherrill (who changed her name to Tammy Wynette), she met Don Chapel, a country singer, who later lost her heart when he admitted that he had taken buff pictures of her on the sly, then swapped them with pen pals he met in porn magazine classified ads. Admittedly, she can't be blamed for fleeing Chapel, but the way in which she tiddlywinked into the arms of her next husband, George "Possum" Jones, at the very least raises serious questions of judgment. The marriage, which ended in D-I-V-O-R-C-E in 1975, is the best illustration yet of the folly of Stand By Your Man-ism and her reed-thin commitment to it.

Jones, a sheaf-haired country groaner, was raised in the Big Thicket region of Texas, a deep-sticks area where, as one native puts it in Jones's 1984 biography, *Ragged But Right*, "The ideal sex ... is after a man really gives his wife a good beating and she's really crying, completely subdued and huddled in terror." Jones was already notorious for being one of the most debauched and booze-soaked country greats ever. As Wynette tells it in *SBYM*, her hasty leap from Chapel's frying pan to Jones's fire occurred one night in 1968. Wynette and Chapel were at home squabbling. Jones, a family friend, showed up drunk. While Chapel unwisely mixed Jones another, he resumed insulting Wynette, saying, "Well, you bitch. You're not fit to sleep with anyway."

Jones went off like an ICBM. "All of a sudden [George] was a tornado, wrecking my house," Wynette writes. "He looked straight at Don and said, 'You don't talk to her like that.' ...

"Don stammered, 'Wha-what's it to you? She's *my* wife!'

"George shot back, 'That may be so, but I *love* her.'" Tammy blurted out that she loved Jones too. Jones scooped up her and the kids and roared off into the night in his Eldorado. "He had rescued me from a husband I didn't love," Wynette coos in *SBYM*, revealing a dangerous Cinderella Complex, "just like the knight on the white charger saved the captive princess in fairy tales."

Touching. Only problem was that this knight had Skoal stains on his armor, and his steed was a white Pontiac convertible customized by one "Mr. Nudie of Hollywood," who fitted it with hundreds of embedded silver dollars, longhorns on the hood, and rifle mounts over the front-wheel fenders. Jones was a bully, philanderer, drunk, and budding cokehead. The Jones sections of *SBYM* are a catalog of interpersonal polecattery. One time he came home in an alcoholic rage, found his loaded .30-.30 rifle, and "aimed [it] right at my back" while Tammy fled. "I heard him say, 'You may run out on me, baby. But you won't run out on this.'"

Is this Wynette's fault? No. But given the obvious follies of Stand By Your Man-ism as it played out in her life, some minor recognition of these facts might have been nice. She could even have composed an answer-song in the tradition of Kitty Wells, whose first hit, "It Wasn't God Who Made Honky Tonk Angels," was a rebuttal to her husband's ode to the joys of painted-slut bar trash. Suggested title for Wynette's number? "Stand By Your Men (Until It Stops Making Sense)."

ALEX HEARD is a frequent contributor to TNR.

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The birth of 'eco-racism.'

BLACK AND GREEN

P. Matthew Rees

Enviros usually aren't thought of as part of the politically incorrect crowd. But in recent years a growing number of minority greens have been accusing "mainstream" (read: white) environmental groups of not only ignoring their concerns but discriminating against them in hiring. Their cause, known as environmental racism, is also based on the charge that toxic waste is being consciously directed at minorities, fostering "radioactive colonialism" and "garbage imperialism." These complaints rest on a largely valid premise: many minorities *do* live near toxic dumps, and mainstream environmental groups rarely address their concerns. But the inflammatory, unsubstantiated charge of racism makes these problems even harder to resolve.

The crusade against environmental racism began in June 1982 when a local NAACP chapter organized a protest against the placement of a PCB-producing incinerator in 66 percent black Warren County, North Carolina, resulting in 500 arrests and national media attention. Today the movement consists of at least ten minority-led environmental groups and numerous grassroots activists. They argue that race is the decisive factor in determining where environmental waste goes. The Rev. Benjamin F. Chavis Jr., executive director of the United Church of Christ, says there has been a "deliberate targeting of people of color communities for toxic waste facilities" and an "official sanctioning of the life-threatening presence of poisons and pollutants in our communities." Robert Bullard, a sociology professor at the University of California, Riverside, and author of *Dumping in Dixie*, a book about environmental racism, draws analogies to the antebellum South: "The plantation and slave economy in the rural parishes was replaced with the petrochemical industry as the 'master' and 'overseer.'" He cites Houston as an example of eco-racism: all five landfills and six of eight incinerators are located in black neighborhoods, despite the fact that Houston's population is only 25 percent black.

Anecdotal evidence aside, the only study to examine the issue closely was done in 1987 by the UCC. It does point to numerous cases where blacks have been exposed to waste disproportionately. For instance, one of the nation's largest hazardous landfills, which houses waste from the eastern half of the United States, is located in Emelle, Alabama, a city that's 79 percent black. But there are also numerous cases of *whites* being exposed to waste disproportionately: Staten Island is 85 percent white and (according to *The Guinness Book of World Records*) houses the world's largest landfill, with over 80 percent of New York City's waste. Of the twenty-seven areas with commercial hazardous waste landfills surveyed in the UCC study, twenty-one (78 percent) were populated by a greater percentage of whites than minorities. (The U.S. minority population is around 24 percent.)

On a national scale, the study revealed that minorities were not exposed to toxic waste in radically higher percentages than whites. Fifty-seven percent of blacks and Hispanics live near toxic waste sites, as against 54 percent of whites, 53 percent of Native Americans, and 46 percent of Asians. When I asked Charles Lee, the author of the study, about these figures, he said they were "conservative" and should not be interpreted to mean that minorities aren't being exposed to environmental waste. But no one has made such a claim. The question is whether such figures are indicative of racism.

A more appropriate term would be "classism." In 1986 the UCC surveyed forty-one residential areas with more than one commercial waste facility and found the median household income was $23,934. Nationally, 1986 median family income was $28,236. Yet there are no geological reasons to site environmental waste in low-income areas. There are, however, economic and political ones. Poorer areas are likely to have less expensive land, and residents often lack the political clout or resources to fight back. They may also be unfamiliar with the numbers and bargaining techniques associated with the waste management industry. In 1987 Gilliam County, Oregon, a poor agricultural area 150 miles east of Portland, was persuaded by Waste Management, Inc. to accept compensation of 75 cents to $1.25 for each ton of trash added to its new dump. Five years later, with that contract intact, the company is getting $25 a ton to dispose of trash from Portland and Seattle.

But even if compensation were fair, eco-racism activists rightly claim that money is no solution. They point to lower life expectancy for blacks and Native Americans and higher infant mortality rates. Unfortunately, there is almost no data on whether hazardous waste contributes to these differences. A forthcoming report by an Environmental Protection Agency task force (organized at the behest of eco-racism activists) recommends data be collected on the connection between race, income, health, and environmental waste, and that this information be used to promote a more equitable distribution of dump sites. Although control over the siting of landfills and incinerators lies almost exclusively with state and local governments, the report highlights an issue—economic equity—that has been notably absent from the EPA agenda, and from that of mainstream environmental groups.

Activists claim that latent racism explains why these groups ignore this and other minority concerns, such as lead poisoning and exposure to pesticides. Racism also explains, according to activists, why so few minorities work for these groups. But again, there's a simpler explanation: environmental groups have traditionally

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devoted themselves to animals, trees, and public lands. For them to do otherwise would mean a sharp, unpopular shift in agenda. As Graham Cox, vice president for public affairs at the National Audubon Society, put it: "If Peter Berle, our president, walked into a board meeting and announced that we were going to stop caring for birds and more for humans, he would be fired."

Minority greens may be on firmer ground when they cite examples of mainstream policies that have *hurt* Americans of all income groups for the sake of the environment. For example, in 1990 the Nature Conservancy and Audubon Society opposed sheep grazing by poor New Mexico Chicanos, even though it was considered "essential" for the survival of a successful economic development project. The Forest Service has estimated that saving the spotted owl will cost the Pacific Northwest 20,700 jobs.

For these reasons, efforts by minorities to form their own groups, such as the African American Environmentalist Association and Native Americans for a Clean Environment, make sense. They offer political support to minority groups fighting landfills, push the EPA to pay attention, and oppose policies by mainstream groups that impoverish the poor. But cries of racism shouldn't be allowed to undermine this cause. In January 1991 the residents of Kettleman City, California, filed a suit against Chemical Waste Management, Inc., in an attempt to block the placement of an incinerator in their community. Disregarding the aid of mainstream groups such as the Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund, they turned to the more grass-roots California Rural Legal Assistance Foundation and have charged that ChemWaste was guilty of "environmental racism." (The precedent-setting case is pending in Sacramento Superior Court.) It's unfortunate their argument did not rest solely on the theory that, as poor people, they should not be burdened with an extra share of the toxic waste. But, then, that doesn't raise the temperature like a good dose of race-baiting. •

THE PRESS

FLASHBACK

By Jack Shafer

By the time *Newsweek* has spotted a trend, one of two things is certain: the trend is about to collapse under the weight of its own hype, or the trend was baseless to begin with. With its February 3 story about LSD's comeback among teenagers, "The New Age of Aquarius," the newsmagazine tallied a rare double.

To be fair to *Newsweek*, its cautionary warning about an acid renaissance is no more foolish than the scores of stories on the subject that ran during the last year in the nation's leading dailies. A Nexis cowboy riding the database range would have roped in more than a few stories on an LSD revival in *The New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Miami Herald*, *Baltimore Sun*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Ft. Lauderdale Sun-Sentinel*, and *Oregonian*, among other papers.

Breathless to a one, they sound minor variations on the acid comeback theme of Joseph B. Treaster's *New York Times* December 1991 piece: "[A] growing number of young people are using LSD, the drug that helped define the counterculture of the 1960s." "Law enforcement officials say LSD is the new drug of choice for trendy teens," intoned the *Houston Post*'s Barbara Linkin the April before. "After years of obscurity," wrote *The Washington Post*'s Robert O'Harrow Jr. on page one a couple of months later, "LSD is re-emerging as a popular drug among relative small but growing groups of middle-class users." The LSD comeback story got a sensational boost last winter in suburban Detroit, where a high school senior allegedly spiked her English teacher's coffee with a tab of acid. "Kids have kind of rediscovered it," a counselor told the *Detroit Free Press*'s Nancy Ann Jeffrey last May.

The credit for LSD's "rediscovery" shouldn't go to the kids, who have been consuming the drug at a steady clip for the last two decades. It belongs to the naive press corps, which has conjured up an acid comeback based on a few LSD busts and anecdotal reports of teenage use while ignoring the evidence that no more LSD is being consumed today than during the mid-'70s.

Not even the drug-abuse industrial complex, that interlocking directorate of drug police and drug counselors, believes LSD is more plentiful. In fact, the National Narcotics Intelligence Consumers Committee, a government consortium of the CIA, DEA, Customs, National Institute on Drug Abuse, and every other outfit with an interest in drugs, reported last summer that "the overall supply of LSD has remained relatively constant since 1980." Likewise, an authoritative seventeen-year survey of drug use by high school seniors indicates no acid groundswell. The only significant change in the LSD market is its price: when corrected for inflation, LSD is cheaper than ever before ($1 to $10 a hit, 1992 street prices).

The "LSD renaissance" story is a hardy one, biding its time in the newsless shoals of newspaperdom, ready to flower at a moment's notice. Like its cousin, the anniversary story (the fiftieth of Pearl Harbor, the fortieth of Queen Elizabeth II's ascendancy, and, upcoming, the twentieth of the attempted assassination of George Wallace), it is always there, waiting for a reporter to assemble its modular units of anecdote and hysteria to fill those vacant column inches. A reporter need only consult the local police log for evidence of LSD busts, or observe the music and fashion worlds for the eternal signs of psychedelia. England's late-'80s acid-house dance craze spawned LSD-is-back notions, but the most reliable foundation for an acid story is a Grateful Dead

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ROBERT W. TUCKER & DAVID C. HENDRICKSON

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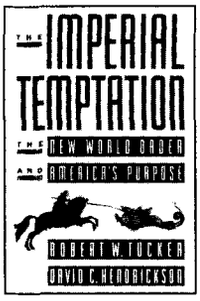

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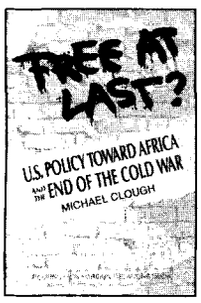

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tour, always good for a few displays of LSD intoxication and a few busts.

As far back as October 21, 1979, *The New York Times* had pegged an LSD comeback ("LSD Use Said to Rise Again in Northern California"), reporting on the seizure of 750,000 doses of the drug. *The Washington Post* chased the *Times* story with its own piece a few weeks later about LSD use in San Francisco, "Reprise From the '60s, LSD Has Come Back to Flower-Child Town." A year later New York *Daily News* reporter Sharon Rosenthal announced in a news feature titled "LSD Is Back" that LSD was everywhere. *The Washington Post* revived the revival three years later in July 1983 with "LSD Found to Be Regaining Its Popularity." That same month UPI reporter Mark Barabak filed a story that ran in the *Philadelphia Inquirer, Miami Herald,* and other papers that plotted LSD's rally in language that reads like the template for today's stories: "Hallucinogenic drugs, popular among a generation that 'tuned in, turned on, and dropped out' in the 1960s, are regaining favor among people who have become cynical about the horror stories surrounding psychedelics, drug experts said yesterday." Sightings continued to the end of the decade: "Sixties Drug Makes Comeback" (*Miami Herald,* October 7, 1984); "LSD Surges Back in D.C. Suburbs" (*The Washington Times,* May 9, 1986); "LSD Pops Back on the Scene" (an investigative paragraph in *USA Today,* April 17, 1987); "Officials: LSD Use on Rise in N.E." (*Boston Globe,* October 11, 1987); "Teenagers Again Turning on to LSD" (*Sacramento Bee,* August 16, 1988); "Renewed Use of LSD Feared" (*Los Angeles Daily News,* January 31, 1989).

The recent pileup of LSD stories couldn't have been triggered by an increase in use because the supply is unchanged since 1980, if you believe the government's NNICC report. The belief that LSD's demographic appeal has shifted from older users to younger ones can't be supported either. Since 1975 the University of Michigan's Institute for Social Research has been tracking drug use among high school seniors for the National Institute on Drug Abuse. In the first year of the survey, 7.2 percent of the senior class acknowledged using LSD once in the previous twelve months. That proved to be the high point for LSD; the figure dropped to a low of 4.4 percent of seniors in 1985, and in the most recent poll (the class of 1991) only 5.2 percent claimed to have tried LSD.

Newsweek could have embraced this statistical evidence to prove that LSD use is unchanged among high schoolers, but instead it twisted the survey results to warn that more seniors are now trying LSD than cocaine. That's true, but only because of a steep *decline* in cocaine use, from 13.1 percent of high school seniors in 1985 to 3.5 percent in 1991. The survey has a margin of error of plus-or-minus 1 percentage point, so it is statistically possible that in 1991 there were still more cocaine-using seniors. So much for the LSD plague.

One reason the press is hyping the nonexistent LSD boom is that it has overdosed on crack stories. Novelty is the lifeblood of journalism, and after six years of horror stories about that drug, editors needed a break. Another contributor to LSD's "rebirth" was a high-profile drug bust of twelve students at University of Virginia fraternity houses in March 1991. The police haul from the bust was small: a dozen partly filled baggies of pot, dope-smoking paraphernalia, three bags of mushrooms, and one bag of LSD—not exactly the Medellín cartel. Such a pitiful stash would have earned the UVA fraternities expulsion from the Greek councils of most colleges in 1969—for inhospitality. Just the same, the UVA bust electrified the desk jockeys who shape the news, with AP wire accounts running in practically every major daily: *LSD is back!*

The odd thing about the recent wave of LSD reporting is that most of today's editors were on campus in the '60s and '70s, and many of them staged their own blitzkriegs through the pharmacopoeia. They know from experience that drug busts are exaggerated by police, that not every drug user becomes a Charles Manson, and that not all drug use constitutes drug abuse. But many of these '60s people now have their own children, children they hope to send to fine schools like UVA. As the minds of these journalists sclerose, the thought of Jason and Heather tripping is scarifying.

At least one reporter, Dan Donovan of the *Pittsburgh Press,* defied the LSD comeback hysteria. In "LSD's Comeback Called Modest Here" (September 15, 1991), Donovan phoned the usual sources—cops and drug treatment officials—and concluded that the minor increase in use could be attributed to Grateful Dead tours of western Pennsylvania. The story was buried on page A20 of the Sunday paper.

JACK SHAFER is editor of *Washington City Paper.*

The other Jerry's telethon.

BROWNIAN MOTION

By Sidney Blumenthal

"Thank you for calling Brown for president. Please wait for the next available representative." I have just dialed Jerry Brown's 800 number, the one he mentions in every debate. Money, he has announced, is the root of all evil. So he will accept contributions of no more than $100. The 800 number is the ether into which the dispossessed will hurl themselves, forging a touch-tone "movement"—a cross between a C-SPAN call-in show and the Home Shopping Network. But what can one learn about the issues of the campaign by pressing Brown's ten digits? "We're not allowed to answer

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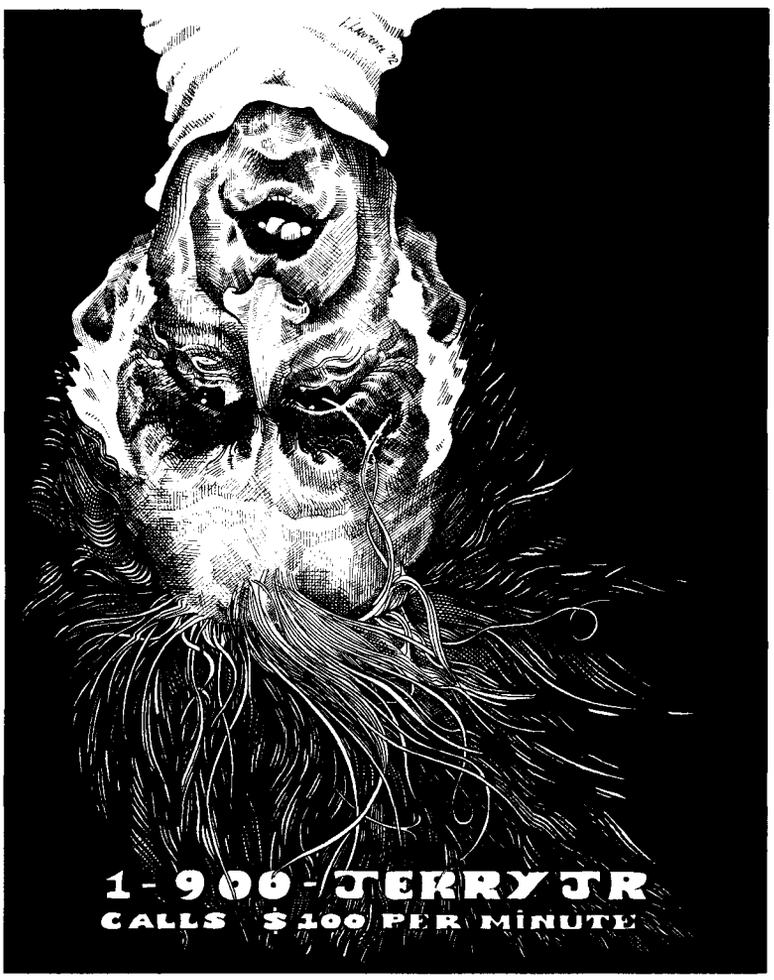
questions," explained the representative who finally appeared on the other end of the line. But if one can't learn about the Brown campaign, is it possible at least to learn about the telemarketing firm that employs the disembodied voices? "We're not allowed to say that," said the representative. "If you want to give money . . . "

The company in question, as it happens, is Compucall, which is owned by the ex-husband and the brother of Brown's campaign manager, Jody Evans, described by one Brown campaign aide as "the last of the die-hard Brownies, who sees herself as his Joan of Arc." Her first husband, Evans said, "offered services in a way no one else could offer—a lot of phones and operators. It's been great for us." There was no advance charge, just hourly billing.

This amateurish nepotism is symptomatic of the dwindled state of Brown's once great hopes. Of all the Democrats running for president, none has a more distinguished political lineage, has held a more powerful office, and has been considered to have had greater potential—the subject of three biographies before he was 45 years old—than Jerry Brown. He was among the brightest of the class of 1974—the cohort of young Democrats, suit coats thrown casually over their shoulders, sleeves rolled, who stepped into the post-Watergate opening as reformers.



JERRY BROWN BY VINT LAWRENCE FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

Brown has always seemed different than the rest of his exquisitely careful peers because of his temperament, which is anything but centrist or centered; he stood out for his instinctive contempt for orthodoxy. He preferred to explain his direction by the metaphor of the canoe, paddling right and left but always moving ahead. As long as he was in motion, his erratic method appeared as more than mere rationalization. Yet his endless talk about the virtue of embracing an "era of limits" only helped to frame the Democrats' defeat in 1980, and his hostility to the toxicity of politics is tangential to the mood of today's electorate, eager for a reversal from economic decline. He is again a forerunner of his class—and of the growing irrelevance of its earlier politics. He is the futurist as anachronism.

The origin of Edmund G. Brown Jr.'s anti-politics lies in his family. His father, Edmund "Pat" Brown Sr., was the dominant figure in California politics in the post-World War II era, a builder of massive public works and a natural politician who loved to be surrounded by rooms full of backslapping legislators. In his father's house, the governor's mansion in Sacramento, Jerry felt himself a prop in a ritualistic play, and entered a seminary. In 1968, after dropping out of Sacred Heart Novitiate, he was drawn to support Eugene McCarthy—not Robert Kennedy. Bobby was too grounded, too gritty, still too much the regular; McCarthy was the ethereal poet whose motives seemed more spiritual than political.

In 1970 Brown was elected California's secretary of state on the basis of criticism of political practices. His name was hardly incidental in his victory. As the state's chief clerk, he catalyzed an initiative that would strictly account for campaign contributions—a platform perfectly pitched for his anti-political run for governor in 1974, in the aftermath of Watergate. He was 36.

His first term had its focused moments: a landmark farm labor law, path-breaking environmental laws, and, for the first time, the appointment of minorities and women to major government posts. Brown refused to inhabit the expensive mansion that Nancy Reagan had had built for Ronnie, preferring to sleep on a mattress on the floor of an apartment. In 1976 when the unknown former Georgia Governor Jimmy Carter appeared unstoppably headed toward the Democratic nomination, Brown entered and swept five primaries in a row. He was using and was used by larger forces—the regulars within the party who mistrusted the outsider, his father's allies. Brown continued his ascent with re-election in 1978 by the biggest margin in California history. His avowal of an "era of limits" in a state that enshrines abundance without end could be taken as an ecological affirmation. But the "era of limits" and "small

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is beautiful" (Brown's "buzzwords," as he called them) were also the smart version of "malaise."

In 1980 Brown again ran against Carter. But he could not fit himself between the president and his main challenger, Edward Kennedy. "Serve the people, protect the earth, explore the universe" was his slogan. His main issues were opposition to nuclear power and a constitutional convention to pass a balanced budget amendment. On the steps of the state capitol in Madison, Wisconsin, Brown visually melted down in a thirty-minute television ad produced by Francis Ford Coppola, titled "The Shape of Things to Come." The special effects went haywire: Brown's face turned green, the capitol dome appeared on his head, and sections of his face turned into gaping black holes. When he materialized again in California, he was even more remote. Californians blamed him for their unresolved problems. In 1982 he ran for the Senate, but lost. Afterward, he drifted to Mexico to learn Spanish, to Japan to study Buddhism in a monastery, and to India to work with Mother Teresa.

Upon his return from his spiritual sojourn, he announced that he wished to be California's chief party apparatchik. As the state's Democratic chairman, he raised millions for an ambitious program to register new voters. An intricate operation was set up by Marshall Ganz, the former farm workers' union field organizer, who had worked on several past Brown campaigns. Yet as soon as Ganz had everything primed to go, needing only funding to make the gears turn, Brown fired him and canceled the project. Brown was tired of raising money. "Once he decided to scuttle the program, he seemed to abandon the leadership of the state party," said Ganz. "Jerry shifted into a passive mode.... Old-style leaders had to master dealing with people. Jerry never had to go through that."

Brown decided to run for the Senate again. But he raised few funds and appeared a certain loser, even if he won a nomination based on name recognition. Suddenly, another path was revealed by Patrick Caddell, Carter's coruscating political consultant self-exiled to L.A. Caddell wanted to lay siege to the capital, and Brown was the weapon at hand. Brown soon attracted Jude Wanniski, the excitable promoter of supply-side economics, disillusioned with the Bush administration. But when Wanniski arranged a meeting between the candidate and Wall Street financiers, Brown neglected to show up.

"Our democratic system has been the object of a hostile takeover, engineered by a confederacy of corruption, careerism, and campaign consulting," declared Brown in his announcement speech. "And money has been the lubricant greasing the deal." Much of what he said, in fact, was plagiarized, word for word, from a manifesto-in-progress written by Richard Goodwin, the former speechwriter for Presidents Kennedy and Johnson. But Goodwin separates himself from Brown's flattery. "He stuck to one note, corruption, and didn't bring out the economic concerns," said Goodwin. "I think it goes back to his father." His single-minded message, moreover, has failed to resonate. After his appearance on the first televised debate, Brown's standing, driven mostly by name recognition, plummeted. In New Hampshire he rests at the bottom, in the low single digits, nearing his base.

In the 1970s Brown's petulance seemed to express something larger than the impulses of his own psyche—a broader skepticism. But over the decades his personae have not accumulated and deepened. There is a jarringly ahistorical quality to him, as though he is immune to experience. He is a false existentialist. "There is a sense of unreality here," says Brown, over and over, as he campaigns in a white turtleneck, like a defrocked priest. His message about the system: just disconnect. Perhaps his moribund condition proves his point. If, as Brown claims, politics is dead, it should hardly be a surprise that his campaign is, too.

By calling the Brown office in Santa Monica, one can hear a number of taped messages: "This is Jerry Brown. Thanks for calling. And please do everything you can to assist and be an active member in the insurgent campaign to take back America." Then another voice comes on the line: "To speak to a live human being, dial zero." •

Let's start over.

A BUDGET CURE-ALL

By Robert B. Reich

At least credit Richard Darman for creative accounting in managing to squeeze the new White House budget into the spending categories and constraints of the 1990 budget agreement. But his efforts were doomed from the start; the agreement is obsolete, and everyone knows it. It was cobbled together before the cold war ended and before the recession started. The question is: What's to replace it?

The real scandal of the budget that President Bush sent to the Hill was not so much the expected deficit in 1993 ($351.9 billion), but the paltry sum that the White House expected to invest in the future ($133.1 billion). This isn't new, of course. For years federal borrowing has exceeded federal investment. To solve the problem, Democrats have talked about creating a "capital" budget or an "investment" budget, designed to make clear how much the nation is investing in the future. Bill Clinton has called for an investment budget. (I'm helping him in the campaign, but he shouldn't be burdened by the following musings.) Yet no one has ever provided a detailed blueprint. How might it look? A sane budget would be one whose spending categories and constraints, and whose sources of revenue, are logically connected to the generation of Americans that benefits

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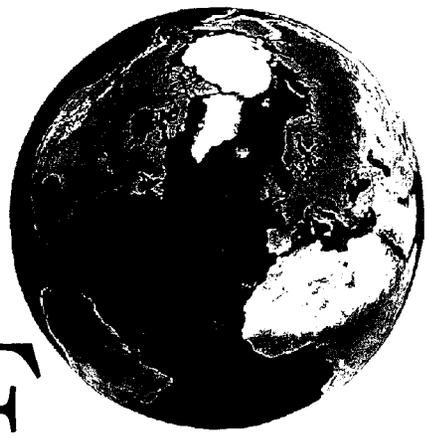
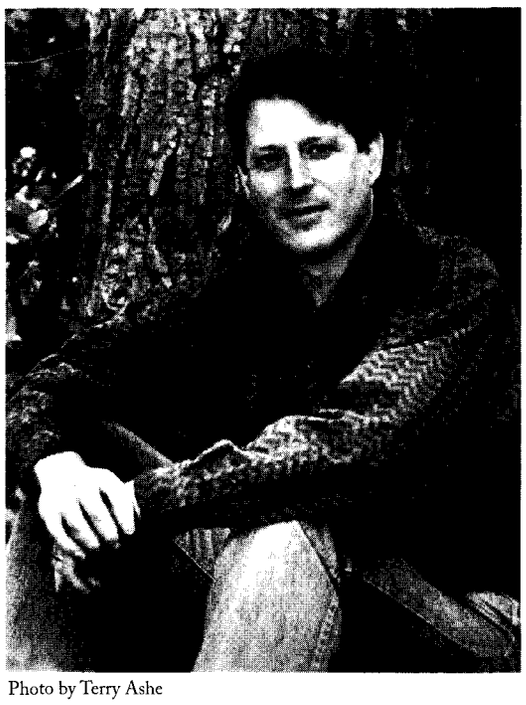


ECOLOGY AND THE HUMAN SPIRIT



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from them. In particular: a budget that reveals how much we're borrowing from the future compared with how much we're investing in the future.

Begin with the basics. Ideally, any federal budget should be divided into three categories corresponding to different time-dimensions of government responsibility: 1. Past obligations to a previous generation of workers, to guarantee them a minimally decent standard of living. Included here would be most spending for Social Security and Medicare. 2. Present obligations to ourselves, to ensure that all Americans enjoy a safe, secure, and minimally decent standard of living. This category would include spending on welfare, criminal justice, and defense. 3. And future obligations to coming generations, to ensure they have the capacity to generate a good standard of living. This means spending on education, training, civilian research and development, and infrastructure.

Although the American population obviously doesn't divide neatly into separate generations, it's still useful to think about the needs of Americans ten or fifteen years from now as separate from their needs today and from the needs of people no longer able to support themselves. For example, revenues to support the retirement of the past generation of workers should come from workers' (and employers') contributions. People can debate about how progressive this system should be—what payments should be required of workers with differing incomes and what benefits should go to retirees of different wealth. And they can debate about whether (and to what extent) the system should be financed on a pay-as-you-go basis, with current workers picking up the tab for retirees. But the system should finance itself—and be separated from the rest of the federal budget. No dipping into the other categories. Likewise, neither of the other two categories should be able to raid *it* for funds.

The second budget category—to maintain the *current* safety, security, minimal living standard of Americans—is logically financed through taxes on current incomes (including investment income). Here again, we can debate how progressive this tax should be, but the principle is the same: revenues to pay for the current living expenses of Americans should come from the current incomes of Americans. There's no reason why one generation should be able to borrow from future generations to finance its own standard of living. Nor should they tap into their own retirement savings (by, say, using surpluses in the Social Security trust fund to offset current budget deficits).

Thus, so long as marginal tax rates don't change from year to year, spending in this second category cannot grow faster than improvements in the incomes of Americans. This seems logical. How can we expect to consume collectively, at a faster rate than we produce? (One small wrinkle: to enable the government to provide extra relief during troughs when incomes stagnate or dip, and to cool the economy during recoveries when incomes surge, the yearly spending cap might be based on a rolling average of national income gains during preceding years.)

The third and last category—investments in the *future* capacities of Americans to produce wealth—is appropriately financed through borrowing that must be repaid in the future, when the nation reaps the benefits of these investments. Such investments are subject to a different constraint than is spending in the other two categories. No self-respecting business executive fails to borrow money if the expected return is much higher than the borrowing costs. Similarly, so long as the likely returns to the nation's future productivity are high enough, borrowing in order to finance such investments makes sense regardless of the amount. In fact it would be irresponsible *not* to do so. Borrowing and investing shouldn't stop until the cost of additional borrowing is no longer worth it—given the expected return on such investments relative to what private investors could get on *their* borrowings.

So much for theory. This sort of budget is logical, and the public can readily understand it. But how would it work in practice? There are at least four big obstacles.

What's an investment? The first and most obvious problem is to decide what programs fit into which category. Since no one wants to have his favorite government program vulnerable to the spending constraints of either the first or the second categories, there's likely to be a stampede into Category Three. After all, the definition of an "investment" is hardly airtight. And when politics tangles with epistemology, politics almost always wins.

But this problem may not be insurmountable. Last Sunday afternoon, with nothing better to do now that football season is behind us, I took out a copy of the White House's new budget proposal and ticked off the items that seemed to me to be justly included within each of the three categories. Category One was fairly straightforward: Social Security and Medicare, including some additional retirement programs like veterans' benefits. But how to distinguish between Categories Two and Three—spending for today and investments for tomorrow? It wasn't nearly as difficult as I imagined. I simply asked myself whether there was any reason to believe that the program would pay off in the form of improved national productivity a decade from now.

Who's to say that my assumptions would be widely shared? Luckily, I had a test. Officials in the White House's Office of Management and Budget undertake a similar exercise each year (presumably with more thought and care than I gave to mine) as part of the budget presentation. The analysis is buried in the back of the budget document. I found their "investment" calculations for FY 1993 and compared them with the ones I'd done.

The two sets of calculations were remarkably alike. For example, I put $13.1 billion of 1993's science, space, and technology programs into my Category Three; OMB dubs $10 billion of these programs "investments." I put $26.5 billion of 1993's transportation spending into the

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category; OMB puts $24.8 billion. I placed $31 billion of education, training, and social services into it; OMB's number is $37.6 billion. For a few programs, OMB is more generous: I didn't put a dime of federal spending on income security, justice, veteran's benefits, housing credits, or general government revenues into my Category Three; OMB tosses over $9 billion worth of these programs into it. There was one big difference. I nominated $20.3 billion worth of programs related to the health and nutrition of children; OMB includes just $1[illegible]1 billion of these. Would my number have been c[illegible]ser to theirs if I had more information about these programs? Would theirs be closer to mine if I had presented my arguments to them? Maybe.

The two sets of calculations totaled up about the same. Under my calculation, in 1993 the White House is planning to invest $124.2 billion in the nation's future—or about 8.2 percent of what it plans to spend that year. OMB's total is $133.1 billion—or 8.8 percent. Either way, a paltry portion of the federal budget.

My point is that there may not be *that* much disagreement over which programs fall into which budget category. Politicians will try to shoehorn their favorites into the investment category, of course. But the danger can be minimized (although not eliminated) by allowing into Category Three only programs that have been so designated by the White House with the concurrence of majorities of the House and Senate Budget Committees.

How to measure the returns on public investment? It's hard enough to predict the benefits of private investments, which at least show up on the bottom line. It's nearly impossible to predict how this or that program will affect the nation's capacity to generate wealth in the future. There are simply too many factors to take into account—and no clear-cut way to measure improvements in national productivity anyway. For years academics have been engaged in lively debates (lively, that is, for academics) over the value of public investments—and even livelier ones about the outcome of investments in education. Of course, some estimates are broadly agreed upon, such as those showing that children in Head Start are far more likely than other poor children to complete their educations and be self-supporting and law-abiding in later life. It's just that, by their very nature, attempts to measure the future productivity gains of public investments are imprecise and subject to debate.

And yet, these controversies notwithstanding, there's a remarkable degree of agreement on the rough *magnitudes* of the returns on such public investments. Almost every economist and policy wonk who has studied the subject has concluded that the United States has woefully underinvested in roads, bridges, sewer systems, worker training, child nutrition, child immunization, civilian research and development, and a host of other areas where the private sector can't be expected to do it all. Almost everyone recognizes that other nations, notably Japan and Germany, are investing far more, as a percentage of their national products, than we are.

Moreover, no one disputes the fact that federal spending on such investments has been declining as a percentage of GNP. Infrastructure spending dropped from 1.14 percent of GNP in 1980 to 0.75 in 1990. Spending on education dropped from 0.51 percent to 0.37 percent. Non-defense research and development, from 0.42 percent to 0.31 percent. So even though *exact* measures are impossible, it is possible to set broad goals for public investment over, say, the next decade.

How to draw down the debt? By 1994, according to Congressional Budget Office projections, the accumulated federal debt will total over two-thirds of the year's gross national product. So even if we raised taxes to cover current expenditures (Category Two), any additional borrowing to finance investments in future productivity (Category Three) would cause yearly interest charges to grow almost as large as those on my Visa bill.

That's why we also need a rule to draw down the accumulated debt as the national economy begins to grow faster—reaping the benefits of these new investments. Again, it's only logical that Americans in the future, who will enjoy a higher standard of living because of investments made today, should pay not only the interest on the debt but also bear some responsibility for reducing it. One possibility: an income tax surcharge that's triggered in any year when the economy grows faster than, say, 4 percent—the proceeds of which would be applied solely to debt reduction.

How to get from here to there? Even if we could agree on these categories and principles, we'd still have to face today's mess. Right now, Categories One and Three are being used to bail out Category Two: that is, the Social Security surplus that's been created to help finance baby-boomer retirees is being used instead to offset the budget deficit, *and* most of the remaining deficit is being used to finance present living standards rather than to invest in the future. So we need a plan that over some period of years will raise tax revenues and reduce Category Two consumption until they become equal. Simultaneously, we have to reduce borrowing and increase Category Three investments until *they're* equal.

Can we do it? Seems awfully difficult. But remember that as public investment increases, we should expect the entire economy to grow faster. That means tax revenues will grow as well. I'm not suggesting a painless transition—only that one of the real objectives is to foster economic growth. And to the extent that we *invest* for the future, it will be that much easier to fulfill our current needs as they arise. But why should the public buy it? Why won't we (and our representatives in Washington) continue to prefer borrowing from the future to finance current consumption, without investing in the future? These are rhetorical questions, of course, to which most Washington-watchers have every right to give a cynical answer. I can offer only one small reason for hope. Most adult Americans *do* have children, and are at least a bit concerned about how their children will live. At best, a budget like the one I'm suggesting may handicap our efforts to deny that we're treating them far worse, collectively, than we would ever dream of treating them individually. •

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Why David Lynch is bad for America.

THE CASE FOR MIDDLEBROW

By Tad Friend

> What can you say about a 25-year-old girl who died? That she was beautiful. And brilliant. That she loved Mozart and Bach. And the Beatles. And me.
>
> —First lines of Erich Segal's *Love Story*

> Everything follows from this principle: that the lover is not to be reduced to a simple symptomal subject, but rather that we hear in his voice what is "unreal," i.e., intractable. Whence the choice of a "dramatic" method which renounces examples and rests on a single action of a primary language (no metalanguage).
>
> —First lines of Roland Barthes's *A Lover's Discourse*

Which book would you rather keep reading? Chances are: Mr. Segal's. *Love Story* was a best seller for seven months, while *A Lover's Discourse* quickly bounced into remainder bins. But which book would you rather be seen reading? Chances are: Mr. Barthes's. The most pernicious modern cultural taboo is the one against admitting that you like middlebrow. Not "like" it. Really *like* it.

We live in a time when highbrow has never been so high—so removed from daily discourse. And lowbrow has never so mesmerized the masses or carried such highbrow chic. What's squeezed in between—the siren call of creamy and proficient pleasure—has never been so decried. We have lost appreciation for the art that was once the mainstay of American culture and the unguilty delight of intelligent readers, listeners, and viewers: the art of middlebrow.

Hounded for years by highbrow derision, by broadsides flowing scornfully from the pens of such culture guardians as T. S. Eliot, Dwight Macdonald, Clement Greenberg, and F. R. Leavis, among many others, we now profess to be above art that provokes only saturated feelings. We disparage "tear jerkers" and "beach reads," fearing that having our tears jerked connotes manipulation, that breezing through a book while basted with Bain de Soleil is somehow less admirable than struggling with a tome we have no hope of understanding. We feel ashamed for preferring Elmore Leonard to Luigi Pirandello, *The Graduate* to *Black Orpheus*, Stevie Wonder to Erik Satie, and for ever watching PBS. But no matter how we lash ourselves to the mast of the "quizzical" and the "refractory," our hearts still quiver when serenaded by pure middlebrow emotions such as sadness and joy.

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The derogation of middlebrow, in short, has gone much too far. It's time to bring middlebrow out of its cultural closet, to hail its emollient properties, to trumpet its mending virtues. For middlebrow not only entertains, it educates—pleasurably training us to appreciate high art. It's the spoonful of sugar that makes the medicine go down. In a culture riven by a choice between *Koyaanisqatsi* and *Porky's*, between works contrived to tickle the rarefied palates of the few and those constructed to microwave the permafrozen brains of the many, middlebrow also reconnects the intellectual with the emotional. It provides some unity in a culture where political, social, and intellectual fragmentation is now the norm. To neglect middlebrow is to deal yet another blow to a civilized and informed discourse, one in which we can all participate and have some clue about what everybody else is talking about.

So what are we talking about? Defining middlebrow is a notoriously tricky endeavor, one that depends in part on an understanding of the neighboring realms of highbrow and lowbrow. A recent attempt at boundary-marking, Kirk Varnedoe and Adam Gopnik's catalog accompanying the "High and Low: Popular Culture and Modern Art" exhibit at New York's Museum of Modern Art, illustrates the bogginess of this territory. High art, for them, is

> the primary material with which any history of art in this century must contend. Achievements in this lineage have always involved, in one way or another, a consciousness of the traditional "high" ceremonial and religious art enshrined in places like the Louvre, and entailed some sense of obligation—even if that obligation was expressed through emphatic rejection and the urge to start afresh—to the grand manner of art.

In other words, high art is high art.

Middlebrow, in contrast, lacks this self-conscious "grand manner." Where highbrow is mediated and labyrinthine, middlebrow is unmediated and direct. Where highbrow is angst, ennui, schadenfreude, middlebrow is anxiety, boredom, envy. Groucho Marx taking a pulse—"Either this man is dead or my watch has stopped"—is textbook middlebrow. So are Fairfield Porter and Georgia O'Keeffe paintings; the better "thirtysomething" episodes; almost any striking and widely disseminated photograph—Cartier-Bresson's picture of an impish lad carrying wine bottles, Eddie Arnold's shot of a Viet Cong

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prisoner getting his brains blown out; "Me and Bobbie McGee"; and Marcel Marceau's miming a prisoner palming the walls of his cell. Each tells a story in familiar fashion, is memorable, and is readily understood by all.

Middlebrow is distinguished by technical competence, singleness of affect, purity of emotion, tidiness of resolution, and modesty of scope. Thus, in 1939 and 1940, Graham Greene wrote *The Confidential Agent* on benzedrine in the mornings and *The Power and the Glory*, more slowly, in the undrugged afternoons. He considered the former one of his "entertainments" (middlebrow); the latter, one of his "serious works" (highbrow). The essential difference between Greene's brows is that his "serious works" are laden with authorial epigrams like "in human love there is never such a thing as victory: only a few minor tactical successes before the final defeat of death or indifference"; or "innocence is like a dumb leper who has lost his bell, wandering the world, meaning no harm." *The Confidential Agent* lacks only this wintry philosophy to have a full complement of Greene's characteristic virtues: the overmatched protagonists, the punishing dialogue, the murderous, clockwork plots. Without the philosophy, we have smart fun—middlebrow.

Context—the frame through which a work is seen—plays a key role in determining its brow. The question "Who farted?" is patently lowbrow—except when Estragon, "recoiling," poses it in *Waiting for Godot*, when it's highbrow. The frames that the culture guardians most often surround otherwise middlebrow work with, thus raising it to highbrow, are the British (consider that Sherlock Holmes and Lord Peter Wimsey seem tonier than Sam Spade, though Sam throws a meaner punch all around; and that the much fawned over "Upstairs, Downstairs" was just "Dallas" with kippers); the otherwise foreign (the Philippines' F. Sionil Jose and Indonesia's Mochtar Lubis are in; James T. Farrell, despite similar themes and prose, is out); the neglected (it's cooler to be caught reading a dog-eared copy of Poe's *Narrative of A. Gordon Pym* than *The Telltale Heart*); and, especially, the abstruse (witness the critical pother over Eco's *The Name of the Rose*, which, stripped of its formidable theoretical scaffolding, was just a chilly murder mystery).

Middlebrow is also affected by the sweep of time and taste. Popular entertainment that outlasts its era gets reexamined by new critics, re-presented to a new audience, elevated, and enshrined. Thus Chaplin and Keaton, once middlebrow, are now unimpeachably regarded as high art. So too Harold Arlen, Matthew Brady's Civil War photos, and the movies of *The Godfather*, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, and *The Shining*, all taken from middlebrow books that remain middlebrow. If Frank Sinatra were dead, he'd be high art; time has already beatified Patsy Cline and Jim Morrison. A populist Rossini opera like *William Tell* or *Barber of Seville* was once clearly middlebrow; now all opera is widely perceived as rarefied and tedious—hence highbrow. (But the classic operas—*Carmen*, *Don Giovanni*—are really pure middlebrow and all the greater for it.)

Occasionally, of course, the process works the other way, and high art becomes middlebrow. (Some works are born middlebrow, some achieve middlebrow, and some have middlebrow thrust upon them.) So Hemingway, once avant-garde, is now a roasted chestnut. Shakespeare's problem plays (*Troilus and Cressida*, *Cymbeline*, *Coriolanus*) rise as worthy of fractious dissertations, and his war horses (*Romeo and Juliet*, *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *Julius Caesar*, *The Tempest*) sink toward middlebrow, their values diminished—or clarified, depending on your point of view—by constant production. In the old favorites Shakespeare's themes are brilliantly middlebrow, because middlebrow essentially elaborates one strong theme, such as love, revenge, or ambition. The problem plays require intellectually mediated reactions, and our sympathies don't lie as readily with one or two characters. Beethoven's Fifth, Sixth, and Ninth Symphonies have played themselves back to Triple A ball; ditto much of the Mozart and Bach so beloved of *Love Story*'s Jennifer Cavilleri. Her favored Beatles, however, were always hugely popular—middlebrow all the way.

The manifold ways in which middlebrow infuses our culture are either ignored or crudely caricatured by culture guardians addled by dainty loathing. In the culture guardians' claret nightmares middlebrow is exemplified by a grandmother rocking on a porch somewhere near Decatur, Illinois. She wears a hair net, drinks a glass of Crystal Lite, and furrows her brow over a *Reader's Digest* condensed *Ben-Hur*. In the context of this magazine's readers middlebrow is much closer to the taste of a well-educated sophomore: Pet Shop Boys and U2 on the stereo; an "encore episode" of "The Fugitive" on A&E (in which rubric it's classier than it was on ABC in 1963); Au Bon Pain croissants in the fridge; and the walls postered with Renoir's boating party and Monet's lilies, Robert Doisneau's photo "Baiser de l'Hotel de Ville, 1950," and a shadowed black-and-white homage to James Dean suffering in leather).

This highbrow stereotyping of the middle stems from cultural and intellectual insecurity—indeed, highbrow may be exemplified by a dinner party at which everyone pretends to have read Richard Rorty. Such stereotyping is rare among those who genuinely respect high art, since they are less threatened by middlebrow than merely uninterested in it. Where high art is work of complex passion—work that may, as we've seen, become middlebrow—highbrow is merely a stance of complexity. It imputes and then fetishizes difficulty for its own sake, as a way of asserting cultural superiority over the less-learned. Emotion and passion are largely valueless here because they don't fit a narrative schema, can't be diagrammed, pigeonholed, reduced. This misplacement of priorities leads us to waste time listening to Anton Webern, reading John Ashbery, and watching plays directed by Peter Sellars.

The archetypal contemporary expression of highbrow is best called highlowbrow, in which highbrow condescendingly co-opts low. It's OK to "see" the Steven Sea-

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gal movie *Hard to Kill* if you make bets on the body count. In the Sontagian sense, it's a trip to summer camp; the highlow sensibility sees all lowbrow in quotation marks. So we can revel in the *New York Post*'s lurid headlines—"Teddy's Sexy Romp!"—any C. David Heymann celeb bio (*Poor Little Rich Girl, A Woman Named Jackie*), "Gilligan's Island," and the Archies' song "Sugar, Sugar" without, in any sense of the phrase, a second thought. In *White Noise*, Don DeLillo has fun with "department of American environments" professors at "College-on-the-Hill" who have discussions like this:

> "September thirty, nineteen fifty-five. James Dean dies. Where is Nicholas Grappa and what is he doing?"
> "Ask me Gable, ask me Monroe."
> "The silver Porsche approaches an intersection, going like a streak. No time to brake for the Ford sedan. Glass shatters, metal screams. Jimmy Dean sits in the driver's seat with a broken neck, multiple fractures and lacerations. It is five forty-five in the afternoon, Pacific Coast Time. Where is Nicholas Grappa, the jerk-off king of the Bronx?"
> "Ask me Jeff Chandler."
> "You're a middle-aged man, Nicky, who trafficks in his own childhood. You have an obligation to produce."
> "Ask me John Garfield, ask me Monty Clift."

This trivia-surfing sensibility leads to intellectualized but fundamentally mindless art, to mere quotation and "de-" and "re-contextualizing." Peter Saul takes Donald Duck, paints a jiggly multiple-exposure of him descending a staircase—eh, voilà! a brilliant emblem of our Disneyfication, a cunning restatement of the Duchampian dilemma, etc.

The problem with art that aims at this highlow sensibility is that it often lacks sympathy for—or belief in—our common humanity. So pervasive has highlow cynicism become that many readers of this magazine would have difficulty even saying "our common humanity" without an ironic edge. Lacking faith that a wide audience will approach their art with trust and goodwill, highlow artists turn precious and diffident.

Martin Amis, Jonathan Demme, Laurie Anderson, David Lynch, and David Byrne all rummage through lowbrow as dispassionately as they would through a clothes hamper, fascinated by unsorted "American [illegible]." While they have had successes—*Money*, *Something Wild*, the early episodes of "Twin Peaks"—their common failing is a tendency to avoid what they see as the chasm in the middle. But that bellying middle is the funnel through which all great art, either on its way up or its way down, must pass. So the work of Amis et al. will, in time, seem increasingly marginal; art that is only slumming has no claim on greatness.

Susan Sontag wrote of camp, the harbinger of highlow, that it "incarnates a victory of 'style' over 'content,' 'aesthetics' over 'morality,' of irony over tragedy." Middlebrow exactly reverses that formula—its emphasis is on content, an accessible message. Often that message is just one emotion: being misunderstood (James Dean), dreamy (Monet), in love with someone who wears a beret and reads Roland Barthes (Doisneau). *The Saturday Evening Post* and *The Saturday Review*, the whole idea of catching up with culture on a lazy Saturday after-

ITEM	HIGHBROW	HIGHLOWBROW	MIDDLEBROW	LOWBROW
TV	Nova	Twin Peaks	Bill Moyers	Studs
City	Trieste	Baltimore	Houston	Tulsa
Nighttime reading	Yellow Silk	Men's Fitness	Playboy	Juggs
Simpson	Lisa	Bart	Marge	Homer
Willie...	Mays	Sutton	Wonka	Smith
Hairy Creature	Yeti	Bigfoot	Sasquatch	Sam Kinison
Brunch music	Messiaen	Kronos Quartet	Gershwin	Pachelbel
Pop music	Elvis Costello	Deee-lite	Madonna	Metallica
Observer	Safire	Miss Manners	Keillor	Buchanan
Feathery cartoon figure	Daffy Duck	Road Runner	Tweety Bird	Dan Quayle
Participant sport	Fencing	Bowling	Jogging	Monster trucks
Spectator sport	Chess	Bullfighting	Football	Monster trucks
Mouse	Art Spiegelman's	Apple computer's	E.B. White's	Walt Disney's
Beefcake	Connery (as Bond)	Seagal	Schwarzenegger	Van Damme
Cheesecake	Iman	Divine	Claudia Schiffer	Jessica Hahn
Norman...	Thomas	Bates	Lear	conquest
Jackson	Shoeless Joe	Jesse	Michael	Action
Sgt.	Shriver	Slaughter	Bilko	Schultz
anti-...	disestablishmentarianism	vivisectionism	pasto	freeze
Initials	EEC	JFK	AAA	KKK
Tea	Lapsang souchong	Long Island Iced	Earl Grey	Mr. T
'80s phenomenon	Reagan	Reagan	Reagan	Reagan

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noon—even Saturday itself—are middlebrow. Redolent of tail fins and Davy Crockett caps, of "Father Knows Best," of the 1950s and early 1960s, middlebrow hearkens to when we believed we were a happy country. Middlebrow is nostalgic. It is white-bread.

In sum, it is never, ever hip. Because ideas and beliefs filter out and become consensual only gradually, middlebrow always trails the next wave. This is actually its greatest virtue: it defines and preserves an enduring set of common American values. The generations that could quote Longfellow's "Hiawatha" are now the generations that flocked to *Dances with Wolves*, but both works reflected and rekindled a longing for the lost American frontier. A great middlebrow poet like Robert Frost or Walt Whitman sings the American ideal: we can all comfortably talk about the mending walls that traverse our body electric. And we can all believe ourselves simultaneously shoulder to shoulder in a great enterprise (Jimmy Stewart) yet iconically solitary (Humphrey Bogart). Middlebrow, which appeals across barriers of age or station, composes our national identity.

To be sure, *bad* middlebrow delivers not truth but "home truths" that sag like Tetley tea bag homilies. For instance, the wretched line from *Our Town* that "there's something way down deep that's eternal about every human being." Everything James Michener has written. Anything issuing from the Wyeth family. Or the cowlicked barbershop boys of Norman Rockwell, the singsong iambs of Joyce Kilmer, and the compose-by-numbers melodies of Andrew Lloyd Webber. (One pleasing fantasy: Eliot, disinterred, lobotomized, and reanimated, shouting "Author, author!" at *Cats*.) All substitute bald sentiment and preachy, phony, or mollycoddling formulas for argument and style. They sink toward lowbrow, which unites us only in leaving our "leisure hours" untroubled by thought, in providing smooth passage from work station to dreamless slumber. They lack verve.

But when that bald middlebrow sentiment is bewigged and given a little thematic styling mousse, you have something wonderfully underappreciated: directness. It is the forcefully forthright that leads to social change. The two novels that have most affected American life—Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and Sinclair's *The Jungle*—were crafted with frank middlebrow intent. Similarly, in *The Bonfire of the Vanities* Tom Wolfe takes it for granted that art is engaged with the world and can shake it up. Highbrow, by contrast, often sees art works as only notional stepchildren of other art works, as self-portraits in a convex mirror.

Middlebrow's strength (and, of course, its limitation) is its lack of irony. Warhol's Brillo boxes and Lichtenstein's Benday dot comics paintings, originally highlow hybrids, soon became middlebrow icons in the American narrative, thereby shedding much of their intellectual content and their irony. We now experience *Look Mickey* and *Campbell's Soup Cans* with unwrinkled brow; no Brechtian alienation makes us question how and why we're experiencing them, makes us wonder if we need a visa for art's new frontier. So David Hockney, Anne Tyler, and Spike Lee, forceful stylists and passionate thinkers all, are middlebrow by virtue of their accessibility. Where highbrow excludes, middlebrow includes, even welcomes. In a culture of conflicting signals and input overload, where so much art dares you to understand it, this is no small virtue and no small relief.

This ease of appreciation leads to another middlebrow virtue: by demystifying art, by bringing it within reach, middlebrow begins a conversation with the viewer or reader that encourages further, more complex and articulate dialogues. We aren't born admiring Debussy and Strindberg; we have to work up to them, apprenticing in the foothills of middlebrow. Chopin's "Chopsticks" leads us to his mazurkas; reading Jorge Amado's magical realism is excellent preparation for Márquez's more demanding pyrotechnics; and much of the luminosity of Cézanne's apples derives from their being unlike any of the round, red, still-life blobs we've previously learned to recognize as "apples."

Middlebrow's tutelary function in turn provokes an attack against it from those who fear, with Dwight Macdonald, that middlebrow values are too seductive; that "instead of being transitional, [they] may now themselves become a debased, permanent standard." This suspicion of middlebrow's allure traverses the political spectrum, from the cranky right to the dogmatic left. Frankfurt Schoolers Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno were horrified that art could provide pleasure, and snorted at the idea that that pleasure might be an inducement to further education. With their usual mixture of condescension and determinism, they declared:

> Fun is a medicinal bath. The pleasure industry never fails to prescribe it. It makes laughter the instrument of the fraud practiced on happiness. Moments of happiness are without laughter ... delight is austere.

Why the fuss? Aristotle had two criteria for art that haven't been improved upon: that it should entertain and instruct. Great high art does both. The culture guardians' fear is that we—the laggardly masses—can't feel and think at the same time. Of the two, they'd rather we were thinking. Unfortunately, as we've seen, their treasured highbrow tends to lecture rather than instruct. Good middlebrow, on the other hand, offers more amusement and less instruction, but both are present and neither is slighted.

There is, in short, nothing wrong—and a great deal right—with art that is content thoughtfully to amuse. When *Network*'s messianic anchorman Howard Beale says television is "in the boredom-killing business," it's meant as a slam. But to really kill boredom, you have to be genuinely entertaining. And to be genuinely entertaining, you have to appeal to your audience's common humanity—yes—to include rather than exclude, to interest by a considered appeal to intelligence. If you do it badly, people like me will make fun of you. But if you do it well, only the culture guardians will get mad, because you will be furthering the notion that art, all art, should disclose not secrets to the few, but treasures to the many. •

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BOOKS & The Arts

Stanley Kauffmann on Films

Back to a Source

I was in Lyon recently to see Ariane Mnouchkine's company, which is away from its Paris home at the moment, touring France. The Mnouchkine productions—three Greek plays—were wonderful enough, but there were bonuses. First, Lyon itself, a gem. Second, the food, unbelievable. Third, the Institut Lumière. The Lumière brothers, Louis (1864-1948) and Auguste (1862-1954), weren't born in Lyon, but they did their film pioneering there in the house that was built by their father, a successful portrait photographer.

I liked the institute before I saw it: Lyon predisposes you, especially through its obvious interest in film and theater. The institute is located on the Rue du Premier-Film, and there is also an Avenue Frères Lumière, an Avenue Roberto Rossellini, a Rue Louis Jouvet, and a Rue Charles Dullin. (I don't even count such commonplaces as a Rue Pierre Corneille and a Quai Romain Rolland.)

Another name that shone before I got there was that of the institute's president, Bertrand Tavernier, a devout Lyonnais who reveled in his city in *The Clockmaker* and *A Week's Vacation*. I knew that his title is honorary, still I hoped he might be there. He wasn't: the director of the institute, Bernard Chardère, *was* there, the man who founded the well-known film magazine *Positif* and who has been running this institute since its inception in 1982. He welcomed me.

I've seen other museums that are in the homes of the people they honor—Toulouse-Lautrec's in Albi, Pirandello's in Agrigento, Goethe's in Frankfurt, Shaw's in Ayot St. Lawrence—but, possibly excepting Toulouse's, none was a museum piece in itself. This belle époque villa is big, bosomy, elegant, with high mansard roofs, stonework chimneys, carved stone under the eaves, and a large glass-enclosed solarium. The reception hall, high-ceilinged and wide, is bordered by a sweeping stairway. The ground floor has several lofty chambers with parquet flooring, ornate mantels wrapping big fireplaces, high mirrors topped by marble heads, inlaid woodwork in the walls, and fancy pargetting in the ceilings. The offices and the library are on the floor above, and I assume (I didn't see them) that they look more contemporary. Downstairs the clothes that I and others were wearing seemed inadequate.

Chardère, who looks a little like the late Henri Langlois, the founder of the Cinématheque Française, calmly disregarded my ignorance of French and his of English and took me on a guided tour. Because we had some common knowledge of the subject and could each get an occasional phrase in the other language, I had a good time. (I can't speak for him.) The centerpiece of the museum is, naturally, its permanent exhibit on the development of the idea of photography, the need for it, and the evolution of the moving picture camera and projector in the hands of the Lumières.

The father, Antoine, was, in addition to his photographic work, a manufacturer of photographic equipment. Louis followed him and Auguste soon joined Louis, and the brothers organized a small factory near the villa for manufacturing photo materials. Then, after he retired, Antoine saw a demonstration in Paris in the early 1890s of the Edison Kinetoscope, a sort of peep show, and he advised his sons to get busy. Others were busy, too, in several countries; the competition was keen. Max Skladanowsky of Berlin actually gave the first public exhibition of film several weeks before the Lumières, but the brothers had already been showing film privately to invited guests. They went public in Paris on December 28, 1895.

It was this debut that ignited the global blaze, and the kingpin of the institute's historical exhibit is the actual projector that was used. Standing now in its place of honor, it looks gawkily innocent. "It's not my fault," it seems to say in its rude mechanical simplicity. "How did I know what would happen?"

The villa and the grounds themselves play a part in the chronicle of early film. The earliest Lumière motion picture, which runs about fifty seconds, is *Workers Leaving the Factory*, the Lumière factory. Chardère indicated where it had stood, about eighty yards away. *Feeding Baby*, in which Auguste and his wife tend their infant son, was shot just outside the house on the other side. (Family note: the two brothers married two sisters, daughters of a Lyon brewer. The two families shared the villa.) Both of these items were on that first Paris bill, along

FILMS WORTH SEEING

Daughters of the Dust. *A beautifully shaped small saga of a black family, 1902, migrating from the Sea Islands, off the Georgia coast, to the North. Julie Dash, writer and director, is a bit indulgent of prettiness, but she is unmistakably gifted. (Reviewed 2/10/92)* **JFK.** *The most-discussed film in years, with good reason. It's historically very debatable and cinematically very strong. (1/27/92)* **Memoirs of a River.** *Judit Elek, a veteran Hungarian director, tells the story of her country's last Jewish trial for ritual murder in 1892. Overlong but vivid. (2/10/92)* **35 Up.** *Every seven years the English director Michael Apted reinterviews a group of people who were aged 7 when he started. The latest installment is as fascinating as the others. (2/17/92)* **—SK**

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with eight other items, most of them shot in Lyon. And all this was done within the lifetimes of some still surviving people.

Chardère explained that various special exhibits run continually—I saw a good one of still photography by someone new—and that there are always film series in progress. The current series is on the subject of actors: the poster features Brando and Garbo. He showed me the very inviting small screening room downstairs, with comfortable scarlet-upholstered seats that, he says, are filled almost every day for the film programs.

Then Chardère loaded me with posters and postcards, pamphlets and brochures, and put me in the car that he had summoned to take me back to my hotel—a good distance because the institute is in an outlying district. (Called Monplaisir. Ah, those Lyonnaises.) This is my note of thanks.

Since then, I've been thinking of that day less as a trip to a museum than as a visit to some people whom I was too late to catch. The richness and generosity of the villa itself seem to reflect the warmth of the people who lived there. What excitement those rooms must have known in those days when a new age was in birth. I felt that I had sensed it during my visit. Fanciful, of course, but that's what fancy is for.

A screenwriter sends a letter of objection to my point in a recent piece about the scarcity of good scripts as against the plenitude of good acting and directing. This man isn't making the usual case that there are good scripts out there that aren't being done—something that playwrights also charge. He says, and I saw the film he's speaking of, that after the script is written, a lot of other hands reach in to mess it up, and the writer gets blamed. I'm sure that this is true in many instances, and I'm also sure that, for critics, there's nothing to be done about it. All we can go by is the credit as given. Anything else would lead to rumor-mongering and to other unfairnesses in other directions.

I once praised a director for a certain shot, and he told me that his assistant had suggested it. So, every time we say, "The direction is by X," we ought to be saying, "The direction is attributed to X." The same pattern applies to writers. But to use that pattern every time would be unfair when it isn't true, and anyway it's too clumsy. All I can add is that, *whoever* is responsible for the current screenplays of the world, most of them are dreadful. •

The Oil Encounter and the novel.

Petrofiction

By Amitav Ghosh

If the Spice Trade has any twentieth-century equivalent, it can only be the oil industry. In its economic and strategic value, as well as its ability to generate far-flung political, military, and cultural encounters, oil is clearly the only commodity that can serve as an analogy for pepper. In all matters technical, of course, the comparison is weighted grossly in favor of oil. But in at least one domain it is the Spice Trade that can claim the clear advantage: in the quality of the literature that it nurtured.

Within a few decades of the discovery of the sea route to India, the Portuguese poet Luis de Camoes had produced the *Lusiads*, the epic poem that chronicled Vasco da Gama's voyage and in effect conjured Portugal into literary nationhood. The Oil Encounter, on the other hand, has produced scarcely a single work of note. In English, for example, it has generated little apart from some more or less second-rate travel literature and a vast amount of academic ephemera—nothing remotely of the quality or the intellectual distinction of the travelogues and narratives produced by such sixteenth-century Portuguese writers as Duarte Barbosa, Tomé Pires, and Gaspar Correia. As for an epic poem, the very idea is ludicrous: to the principal protagonists in the Oil Encounter (which means, in effect, America and Americans on the one hand and the peoples of the Arabian Peninsula and the Persian Gulf on the other), the history of oil is a matter of embarrassment verging on the unspeakable, the pornographic. It is perhaps the

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one cultural issue on which the two sides are in complete agreement.

Still, if the Oil Encounter has proved barren, it is surely through no fault of its own. It would be hard to imagine a story that is its equal in drama, or in historical resonance. Consider its Livingstonian beginnings: the Westerner with his caravan-loads of machines and instruments thrusting himself unannounced upon small, isolated communities, deep within some of the most hostile environments on earth. And think of the postmodern present: city-states where virtually everyone is a "foreigner"; admixtures of peoples and cultures on a scale never before envisaged; vicious systems of helotry juxtaposed with unparalleled wealth; deserts transformed by technology and military devastation on an apocalyptic scale.

It is a story that evokes horror, sympathy, guilt, rage, and a great deal else, depending on the listener's situation. The one thing that can be said of it with absolute certainty is that no one anywhere who has any thought either for his conscience or his self-preservation can afford to ignore it. So why, when there is so much to write about, has this encounter proved so imaginatively sterile?

On the American side, the answers are not far to seek. To a great many Americans, oil smells bad. It reeks of unavoidable overseas entanglements, a worrisome foreign dependency, economic uncertainty, risky and expensive military enterprises; of thousands of dead civilians and children and all the troublesome questions that lie buried in their graves. Bad enough at street level, the smell of oil gets a lot worse by the time it seeps into those rooms where serious fiction is written and read. It acquires more than just a whiff of that deep suspicion of the Arab and Muslim worlds that wafts through so much of American intellectual life. And to make things still worse, it begins to smell of pollution and environmental hazards. It reeks, it stinks, it becomes a Problem that can be written about only in the language of Solutions.

But there are other reasons why there isn't a Great American Oil Novel, and some of them lie hidden within the institutions that shape American writing today. It would be hard indeed to imagine the writing school that could teach its graduates to find their way through the uncharted firmaments of the Oil Encounter. In a way, the professionalization of fiction has had much the same effect in America as it had in Britain in another imperial age: as though in precise counterpoint to the increasing geographical elasticity of the country's involvements, its fictional gaze has turned inward, becoming ever more introspective, ever more concentrated upon its own self-definition. In other words, it has fastened upon a stock of themes and subjects each of which is accompanied by a well-tested pedagogic technology. Try and imagine a major American writer taking on the Oil Encounter. The idea is literally inconceivable.

It isn't fair, of course, to point the finger at American writers. There isn't very much they could write about: neither they nor anyone else really knows anything at all about the human experiences that surround the production of oil. A great deal has been invested in ensuring the muteness of the Oil Encounter: on the American (or Western) side, through regimes of strict corporate secrecy; on the Arab side, by the physical and demographic separation of oil installations and their workers from the indigenous population.

The Trench
by Abdelrahman Munif
translated by Peter Theroux
(Pantheon, 554 pp., $25)

Cities of Salt
by Abdelrahman Munif
translated by Peter Theroux
(Vintage, 627 pp., $12.95 paper)

It is no accident, then, that the genre of "My Days in the Gulf" has yet to be invented. Most Western oilmen of this generation have no reason to be anything other than silent about their working lives. Their experience of the Middle East is culturally a nullity, lived out largely within portable versions of Western suburbia.

In some ways the story is oddly similar on the Arab side, except that there it is a quirk of geography—of geology, to be exact—that is largely to blame for oil's literary barrenness. Perversely, oil chose to be discovered in precisely those parts of the Middle East that have been the most marginal in the development of modern Arab culture and literature—on the outermost peripheries of such literary centers as Cairo and Beirut.

Until quite recently, the littoral of the Gulf was considered an outlying region within the Arab world, a kind of frontier whose inhabitants' worth lay more in their virtuous simplicity than in their cultural aspirations. The slight curl of the lip that inevitably accompanies an attitude of that kind has become, if anything, a good deal more pronounced now that many Arab writers from Egypt and Lebanon—countries with faltering economies but rich literary traditions—are constrained to earn their livelihood in the Gulf. As a result, young Arab writers are no more likely to write about the Oil Encounter than are their Western counterparts. No matter how long they have lived in the Gulf or in Libya, when it comes to the practice of fiction they generally prefer to return to the familiar territories staked out by their literary forebears. There are, of course, some notable exceptions (such as the Palestinian writer Ghassan Kanafani's remarkable story "Men in the Sun") but otherwise the Gulf serves all too often as a metaphor for corruption and decadence; a surrogate for the expression of the resentment that so many in the Arab world feel toward the regimes that rule the oil kingdoms.

In fact, very few people anywhere write about the Oil Encounter. The silence extends much further than the Arabic- or English-speaking worlds. Take Bengali, a language deeply addicted to the travelogue as a genre. Every year several dozen accounts of travel in America, Europe, China, and so on are published in Bengali, along with innumerable short stories and novels about expatriates in New Jersey, California, and various parts of Europe. Yet the hundreds of thousands of Bengali-speaking people who live and work in the oil kingdoms scarcely ever merit literary attention—or any kind of interest, for that matter.

As one of the few people who have tried to write about the floating world of oil, I can bear witness to its slipperiness, to the ways in which it tends to trip fiction into incoherence. In the end, perhaps, it is the craft of writing itself—or rather writing as we know it today—that is responsible for the muteness of the Oil Encounter. The experiences that oil has generated run counter to many of the historical imperatives that have shaped writing over the last couple of centuries and given it its distinctive forms.

The territory of oil is bafflingly multilingual, for example, while the novel, with its conventions of naturalistic dialogue, is most at home within monolingual speech communities (with nation-states, in other words). Equally the novel is never more comfortable than when it is luxuriating in a "sense of place," reveling in its unique power to evoke mood and atmosphere. But the experiences associated with oil are lived out within a space that is no place at all, a world that is intrinsically displaced, heterogeneous, and international. It is a world that poses a radical challenge not merely to the practice of writing as we know it, but to much of modern culture:

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to such notions as the idea of distinguishable and distinct civilizations, or recognizable and separate "societies." It is a world whose closest analogues are medieval, not modern—which is probably why it has proved so successful in eluding the gaze of contemporary global culture. The truth is that we do not yet possess the form that can give the Oil Encounter a literary expression.

For this reason alone, *Cities of Salt*, the Jordanian writer Abdelrahman Munif's monumental five-part cycle of novels dealing with the history of oil, ought to be regarded as a work of immense significance. It so happens that the first novel in the cycle is also in many ways a wonderful work of fiction, perhaps even in parts a great one. Peter Theroux's excellent English translation of this novel was published a few years ago under the eponymous title *Cities of Salt*, and now its successor, *The Trench*, has appeared.

Munif's prose is extremely difficult to translate, being rich in ambiguities and unfamiliar dialectical usages, and so Theroux deserves to be commended for his translations—especially of the first book, where he has done a wonderful job. He is scrupulously faithful to both the letter and the spirit of the original, while sacrificing nothing in readability. Where Theroux has intervened, it is in what would appear to be the relatively unimportant matters of punctuation and typography. (He has numbered each chapter, though the Arabic text does not really have chapters at all, but merely extended breaks between pages; and he has also eliminated Munif's favorite device of punctuation, a sentence or paragraph that ends with two period points rather than one, to indicate indeterminacy, inconclusivity, what you will ...) These changes are slight enough, but they have the overall effect of producing a text that is much more "naturalistic" than the original. One day a professor of comparative literature somewhere will have fun using Theroux's translations to document the changes in protocol that texts undergo in being shaped to conform to different c tural expectations.

The Arabic title of Munif's first novel has the connotation of "the wilderness" or "the desert," and it begins with what is possibly the best and most detailed account of that mythical event, a First Encounter, in fiction—all the better for being, for once, glimpsed from the wrong end of the telescope. The novel opens, appropriately, on an oasis whose name identifies it as the source, or the beginning: Wadi al-Uyoun, "an outpouring of green in the harsh, obdurate

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desert." To the caravans that occasionally pass through it, as to its inhabitants, the wadi is an "earthly paradise," and to none more so than one Miteb al-Hathal ("the Troublemaker"), an elder of a tribe called al-Atoum:

> Left to himself to talk about Wadi al-Uyoun, Miteb al-Hathal would go on in a way no one could believe, for he could not confine himself to the good air and the sweetness of the water ... or to the magnificent nights; he would tell stories which in some cases dated back to the days of Noah, or so said the old men.

But unsettling portents soon begin to intrude upon this earthly paradise. One evening at sunset, one of Miteb's sons returns from watering the family's livestock and tells his father of the arrival of "three foreigners with two marsh Arabs, and they speak Arabic"—"People say they came to look for water." But when Miteb goes to find out for himself, he sees them going to "places no one dreamed of going," collecting "unthinkable things," and writing "things no one understood," and he comes to the conclusion that "they certainly didn't come for water—they want something else. But what could they possibly want? What is there in this dry desert besides dust, sand, and starvation?"

The people of the wadi hear the foreigners asking questions "about dialects, about tribes and their disputes, about religion and sects, about the rocks, the winds and the rainy season"; they listen to them quoting from the Koran and repeating the Muslim profession of faith; and they begin to "wonder among themselves if these were jinn, because people like these who knew all those things and spoke Arabic yet never prayed were not Muslims and could not be normal humans." Reading the portents, Miteb the Troublemaker senses that something terrible is about to befall the wadi and its people, but he knows neither what it is nor how to prevent it. Then suddenly, to everyone's relief, the foreigners leave, and the wadi settles back, just a trifle uneasily, to its old ways.

But soon enough the strangers come back. They are no longer just unspecified "foreigners" but Americans, and they are everywhere, digging, collecting, and handing out "coins of English and Arab gold." Their liberality soon wins them friends in the wadi, but even the closest of their accomplices is utterly bewildered by their doings: "nothing was stranger than their morning prayers: they began by kicking their legs and raising their arms in the air, moving their bodies to the left and right, and then touching their toes until they were panting and drenched with sweat." Then a number of "yellow iron hulks" arrive, adding to the bewilderment of the wadi's inhabitants: "Could a man approach them without injury? What were they for and how did they behave—did they eat like animals or not?" Fearing the worst, the people of the wadi go to their emir to protest, only to be told that the Americans have "come from the ends of the earth to help us"—because "'There are oceans of blessings under this soil.'"

The protests are quickly suppressed, Miteb and other troublemakers are threatened with death, and before long the wadi's orchards and dwellings are demolished by the "yellow iron hulks." After the flattening of his beloved wadi, Miteb mounts his "white Omani she-camel" and vanishes into the hills, becoming a prophetic spectral figure who emerges only occasionally from the desert to cry doom and to strike terror into those who collaborate with the oilmen. As for Miteb's family and the rest of the wadi's inhabitants, they are quickly carried away by passing camel caravans. A number of them set out for a coastal settlement called Harran ("the Overheated"), where the new oil installations are to be built, a "cluster of low mud houses"—a place evidently very much as Doha and Kuwait were only a few decades ago.

The rest of Munif's narrative centers upon the early stages of Harran's transformation: the construction of the first roads, the gradual influx of people, the building of the oil installations, the port and the emir's palace. Working in shifts, the newly arrived Arab workers and their American overseers slowly conjure two new townships into being, Arab Harran and American Harran. Every evening, after the day's work is done, the men drift home

> to the two sectors like streams coursing down a slope, one broad and one small, the Americans to their camp and the Arabs to theirs, the Americans to their swimming pool, where their racket could be heard in the nearby barracks behind the barbed wire. When silence fell the workers guessed the Americans had gone into their air-conditioned rooms whose thick curtains shut everything out: sunlight, dust, flies, and Arabs.

Soon Harran no longer quite belongs to its people, and the single most important episode in the building of the new city has little to do with them. It is the story of an R-and-R ship that pays the city a brief visit for the benefit of the Americans living in the yet-unfinished oiltown:

> The astonished people of Harran approached [the ship] imperceptibly, step by step, like sleepwalkers. They could not believe their eyes and ears. Had there ever been anything like this ship, this huge and magnificent? Where else in the world were there women like these, who resembled both milk and figs in their tanned whiteness? Was it possible that men could shamelessly walk around with women, with no fear of others? Were these their wives, or sweethearts, or something else?

For a whole day and night, the inhabitants of Harran watch the Americans of the oiltown disporting themselves with the newly arrived women, and by the time the ship finally leaves "the men's balls are ready to burst." This event eventually comes to mark the beginning of the history of this city of salt:

> This day gave Harran a birth date, recording when and how it was built, for most people have no memory of Harran before that day. Even its own natives, who had lived there since the arrival of the first frightening group of Americans and watched with terror the realignment of the town's shoreline and hills—the Harranis, born and bred there, saddened by the destruction of their houses, recalling the old sorrows of lost travelers and the dead—remembered the day the ship came better than any other day, with fear, awe, and surprise. It was practically the only date they remembered.

The most sustained wrong note in *Cities of Salt* is reserved for its conclusion. The novel ends with a dramatic confrontation between the old Harran and the new: between a world where the emir sat in coffeehouses and gossiped with the Bedouin, where everybody had time for everyone else and no one was ever so ill that they needed remedies that were sold for money, and a universe in which Mr. Middleton of the oil company holds their livelihoods in his hands, where the newly arrived Lebanese doctor Subhi al-Mahmilji ("physician and surgeon, specialist in internal and venereal diseases, Universities of Berlin and Vienna") charges huge fees for the smallest service, where the emir spies on the townspeople with a telescope and needs a cadre of secret police to tell him what they are thinking. "Every day it's gotten worse," says one longtime resident of Harran, pointing toward the American enclave: "I told you, I told every one of you, the Americans are the disease, they're the root of the problem, and what's happened now is nothing compared to what they have in store for us."

The matter comes to a head when a series of events—a killing by the secret

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police, sightings of the troublemaking Miteb, the laying-off of twenty-three workers—prompts the workers of Harran to invent spontaneously the notion of the strike. They stop working and march through the town chanting:

> ... The pipeline was built by beasts of prey.
> We will safeguard our rights.
> The Americans do not own it.
> This land is our land.

Then, led by two of Miteb the Troublemaker's sons, they storm the oil installation, sweeping aside the emir's secret police and the oil company's guards, and rescue some of their fellow workers who'd been trapped inside. And the book ends with an unequivocal triumph for the workers: the half-crazed emir flees the city after ordering the oil company to reinstate its sacked employees.

It is not hard to see why Munif would succumb to the temptation to end his book on an optimistic note. His is a devastatingly painful story: a slow, roundabout recounting of the almost accidental humiliation of one people by another. There is very little bitterness in Munif's telling of it. Its effectiveness lies rather in the gradual accumulation of detail. Munif's American oilmen are neither rapacious nor heartless. On the contrary, they are eager, businesslike, and curious. When invited to an Arab wedding, they ask "about everything, about words, clothing and food, about the names of the bridegroom and his bride and whether they had known each other before, and if they had ever met.... Every small thing excited the Americans' amazement." It is not through direct confrontations that the Harranis meet their humiliation. Quite the opposite. Theirs is the indignity of not being taken seriously at all; of being regarded as an obstacle on the scale of a minor technical snag in the process of drilling for oil.

Better than any other, Munif's method succeeds in showing us why so many people in the Middle East are moved to clutch at straws to regain some measure of self-respect for themselves; why so many Saudis, for example, felt the humiliation of Iraq's army almost as their own. But in fact the story is even grimmer than Munif's version of it, and the ending he chooses is founded in pure wish-fulfillment. It probably has more to do with its author's own history than with the story of oil in the Gulf.

Abdelrahman Munif was born in 1933, into a family of Saudi Arabian origin settled in Jordan. (He was later stripped of his Saudi citizenship for political reasons.) He studied in Baghdad and Cairo, and went on to earn a Ph.D in oil economics at the University of Belgrade—back in the days of Titoite socialism, when books written by Progressive writers always ended in working-class victories. Since then Munif's working life has been spent mainly in the oil industry in the Middle East, albeit in a rather sequestered corner of it: he has occupied important positions in the Syrian Oil Company, and he has served as editor in chief of an Iraqi journal called *Oil and Development.*

No one, in other words, is in a better position than Munif to know that the final episode in his story is nothing more than an escapist fantasy. He must certainly be aware that the work forces of the international oil companies in the Arabian peninsula have never succeeded in becoming politically effective. When they showed signs of restiveness in the 1950s, they were ruthlessly and very effectively suppressed by their rulers, with the help of the oil companies. Over the last couple of decades, the powers-that-be in the oil sheikhdoms (and who knows exactly who they are) have followed a careful strategy for keeping their workers quiescent: they have held the Arab component of their work forces at a strictly regulated numerical level, while importing large numbers of migrants from several of the poorer countries of Asia.

The policy has proved magically effective in the short run. It has created a class of workers who, being separated from the indigenous population (and from each other) by barriers of culture and language, are politically passive in a way that a predominantly Arab work force could never be within the Arab-speaking world—a class that is all the more amenable to control for living perpetually under threat of deportation. It is, in fact, a class of helots, with virtually no rights at all, and its members are often subjected to the most hideous kinds of physical abuse. Their experience makes a mockery of the human rights rhetoric that accompanied the Gulf war; the fact that the war has effected no changes in the labor policies of the oil sheikhdoms is proof in the eyes of millions of people in Asia and Africa that the "new world order" is designed to defend the rights of certain people at the expense of others.

Thus, the story of the real consequences of the sort of political restiveness that Munif describes in *Cities of Salt* is not likely to warm the heart quite as cozily as the ending he gives his novel. But if Munif can be accused of naïveté on this score, he must still be given

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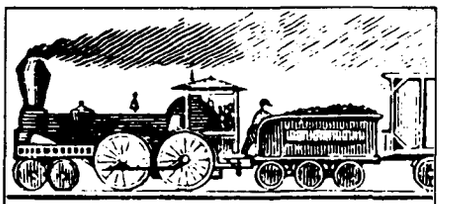

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credit for seeing that the workplace, where democracy is said to begin, is the site where the foundations of contemporary authoritarianism in the oil sheikhdoms were laid.

Today it is a commonplace in the Western media that aspirations toward democracy in the Arabian peninsula are a part of the fallout of changes ushered in by oil and the consequent breakdown of "traditional" society. In fact, in several instances exactly the opposite is true: oil and the developments it has brought in its wake have been directly responsible for the suppression of whatever democratic aspirations and tendencies there were within the region.

Certain parts of the Gulf such as Bahrain, whose commercial importance far predates the discovery of oil, have long possessed sizable groups of businessmen, professionals, and skilled workers—a stratum not unlike a middle class. On the whole, that class shared the ideology of the nationalist movements of various nearby countries such as India, Egypt, and Iran. It was their liberal aspirations that became the first victims of oil's most bizarre, most murderous creation: the petro-despot, dressed in a snowy *dishdasha* and armed with state-of-the-art weaponry—the creature whose gestation and birth Munif sets out to chronicle in the second volume of the *Cities of Salt* cycle, *The Trench.*

Unfortunately *The Trench* comes as a great disappointment. The narrative now moves away from Harran to a city in the interior called Mooran ("the Changeable"), which serves as the seat of the country's ruling dynasty. With the move to the capital, the focus of the narrative now shifts to the country's rulers.

The story of *The Trench* is common enough in the oil sheikhdoms of the Arabian peninsula: it begins with the accession to power of a sultan by the name of Khazael and it ends with his deposition, when he is removed from the throne by rival factions within the royal family. Munif describes the transformations that occur during Sultan Khazael's reign by following the career of one of his chief advisers, a Syrian doctor called Subhi al-Mahmilji (who earlier played an important part in the creation of the new Harran). The story has great potential, but Munif's voice does not prove equal to the demands of the narrative. It loses the note of wonder, of detached and reverential curiosity, that lent such magic to parts of *Cities of Salt,* while gaining neither the volume nor the richness of coloring that its material demands.

Instead Munif shifts to satire, and the change proves disastrous. He makes a valiant attempt—not for nothing are his books banned in various countries in the Arabian peninsula—but satire has no hope of success when directed against figures like Sultan Khazael and his family. No one, certainly no mere writer of fiction, could hope to satirize the royal families of the Arabian peninsula with a greater breadth of imagination than they do themselves. As countless newspaper reports can prove, factual accounts of their doings are well able to beggar the fictional imagination. Indeed, in the eyes of the world at large, Arab and non-Arab, the oil sheikh scarcely exists except as a caricature; he is the late twentieth century's most potent symbol of decadence, hypocrisy, and corruption. He pre-empts the very possibility of satire. Of course, it wasn't always so. The compulsions and the absurdities of an earlier generation of oil sheikhs had their roots in a genuinely tragic historical predicament. But those very real dilemmas are reduced to caricature in Munif's Sultan Khazael.

Even where it is successful, moreover, Munif's satire is founded ultimately upon a kind of nostalgia, a romantic hearkening back to a pristine, unspoiled past. It is not merely Americans from the oil companies who are the intruders here: every "foreigner" is to some degree an interloper in Harran and Mooran. As a result, Munif is led to ignore those very elements of the history of the oil kingdoms that ought to inspire his curiosity, the extraordinary admixtures of cultures, peoples, and languages that have resulted from the Oil Encounter.

Workers from other parts of Asia hardly figure at all in Munif's story. When they do it is either as stereotypes (a Pakistani doctor in *Cities of Salt* bears the name Muhammad Jinnah) or as faceless crowds, a massed symbol of chaos: "Once Harran had been a city of fishermen and travelers coming home, but now it belonged to no one; its people were featureless, of all varieties and yet strangely unvaried. They were all of humanity and yet no one at all, an assemblage of languages, accents, colors and religions." The irony of *The Trench* is that in the end it leaves its writer a prisoner of his intended victim. Once Munif moves away from the earliest stages of the Oil Encounter, where each side's roles and attributes and identities are clearly assigned, to a more complicated reality—to the crowded, multilingual, culturally polyphonic present of the Arabian peninsula—he is unable to free himself from the prison house of xenophobia, bigotry, and racism that was created by precisely such figures as his Sultan Khazael. In its failure, *The Trench* provides still one more lesson in the difficulties that the experience of oil presents for the novelistic imagination. •

The Gentleman as Hero

By P. N. Furbank

Trollope: A Biography by N. John Hall

(Oxford University Press, 581 pp., $35)

Chameleonism in a literary biographer, it could be argued, is a vice, and those famous "sympathies" between biographer and subject, of whom it is said admiringly that the prose of the one can hardly be distinguished from the prose of the other, are a snare. It is bad tactics, and a fault of taste, to be epigrammatic in a life of Oscar Wilde or mellifluous in a life of Walter Pater.

The rule would certainly seem to apply in the case of Anthony Trollope, for reasons that reach deep into his life and his character. For he was a signal example of a self-made, or "twice-born," man. The central theme of his *Autobiography* is how a wretched and slovenly idler took an iron grip on himself and developed a bent for, and a delighted addiction to, thoroughness and regularity; how a misfit found his salvation in turning himself into a well-running machine.

There was a price to pay for this mechanization, but it was not altogether the expected one. It had no hardening effect on his heart and feeling. He remained a truculent but tenderhearted man. But it caused him, a very intelligent person, to dismiss an enormous number of things as not to be talked about, or even thought about. On a few

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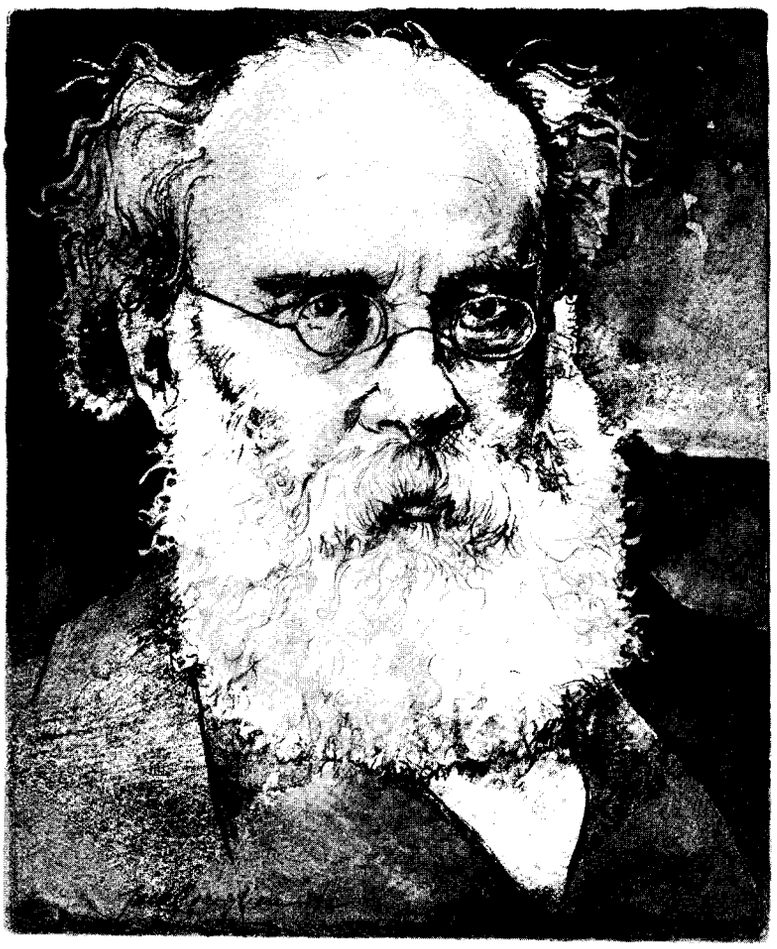
topics he could be his heterodox, original, and profound self, but on a hundred others it suited him to be superficial, reacting—John Bullishly or otherwise—in ways neither revealing nor very interesting to us. The split is apparent in his *Autobiography*, which in its earlier pages, in their clarity and concision, is so compelling and moving, and which in its later ones grows almost crazily (and certainly tediously) prosaic and materialistic, culminating in an itemized list of his literary earnings. Trollope's half-admirer Henry James was amazed by the book's "density, blockishness, and general thickness and soddenness."

Such a writer presents problems to a biographer. Trace him faithfully through all the day-to-day vicissitudes of his career, follow him loyally across oceans to foreign scenes, and for nine-tenths of the time, ninety-nine hundredths even, one will only witness his superficial self. How is the biographer to cope with such a subject? Not by chameleonism, I would argue, or by emulating Trollope's own fanatical addiction to thoroughness and regularity. There have been three enormous biographies of Trollope published within the short space of the last four years: R. H. Super's 280,000-word *The Chronicler of Barsetshire: A Life of Anthony Trollope* (1988), Richard Mullen's *Anthony Trollope: A Victorian in His World* (1989), which runs to some 382,000 words, and now N. John Hall's *Trollope: A Biography*, about the same length as Super's.



ANTHONY TROLLOPE BY JACK COUGHLIN FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

All three are tremendous achievements, the fruit of incalculable labor, devotion, and scholarly expertise. Super's was rightly praised by John Sutherland, when it came out, as being "beyond reproach" and a "magnificent distillation of the most thorough kind of scholarly research"; and one might bestow much the same compliment on Mullen's and Hall's. In a sense, though, these scholars (Super and Hall especially) seem to have produced the same book, and it is the wrong one for Trollope—as with those Victorian architects who thought that a library, a bank, and a bathhouse should be built in the same Gothic style. James complained that in Trollope's later novels one heard "the dull impersonal rumble of the mill-wheel." There is an echo of that rumble in these biographies.

Anyway, one puzzles over such an uprush of Trollope biographies, though since the scholarly life is notoriously badly organized, one need not look for dark explanations. In fact, there is thoroughgoing amity among these scholars, who all acknowledge their debts to one another's work, which they have generously shared rather than jealously guarded. (Hall explains that when Super's *The Chronicler of Barsetshire* appeared just as he was completing his own, he decided not to read it, not wishing to be "answering" that book, though he and Super had been corresponding about Trollope for years.)

Super has a thesis, to the effect that Trollope's *Autobiography*, though "one of the best of all autobiographies," is not actually to be trusted. Thus, where his account differs from Trollope's, "it may be assumed that the evidence is on the side of the present narrative." It is not true (as Super correctly points out) that Trollope never won a school prize at Harrow; it is not true that he made no friends at school, or that (as he claimed) he never lived in a cathedral town. (He forgot Winchester.) Indeed—but here the reader blinks, for it raises a quite different sort of question—the young man who left school in 1834 was "not notably unhappy with his life."

Mullen's speciality is indicated by his subtitle. In point of fact, I do not like that subtitle very much, for it seems neither true nor desirable that a novelist should have a "world." Still, Mullen's book is brimming with absorbing general information, of varying degrees of relevance. Of the three books, his gives much the best account of Mrs. Trollope's radical and Carbonarist circle; and though we do not positively need to know how hay was harvested in the early 1800s just because Trollope was made to help in his father's hay fields, one enjoys being told.

As for Hall, he denies writing a "thesis" biography. Still, he has some "leading ideas"—such as that Trollope was more a man of intellect than is generally recognized, and that his genius was essentially a comic one. Also he deliberately devotes more space than other biographers to the last decade of Trollope's life—the years of *The Duke's Children* (1880), *Dr. Wortles's School* (1881), and his science-fiction fantasy *The Fixed Period* (1882)—since "he went on writing and developing as a writer during these latter years." Hall's scholarship is hugely impressive: he has burrowed to great effect in school records, parliamentary papers, provincial and colonial journals, memoirs and unpublished diaries, and the like. It is the sort of biography that, had Super's not appeared before it, might well have been hailed as definitive.

As for the matter of style, he has his own chosen rhythm and sticks to it, Trollopianly, from the cradle in Keppel Street to the grave in Kensal Green. His prose is thoroughly workmanlike, perhaps a shade grayer than Super's but enlivened every now and then with a nice affectionate wryness. He insists rightly that what Trollope said as a Blimpish private (or public) individual is

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often very different from what he conveys, or implies, in his novels. "When writing fiction he seems able to detach himself from his opinions." It is very true; it startles one sometimes, since Trollope is no feminist, what savagely despairing and witty things his women characters are made to say about the position of women.

On one point of method, though, I am inclined to think that Hall goes wrong. Literary biography needs strict rules, above all when it comes to relating fiction to real life. It should be a rule not to expect an author's life to explain or to interpret his or her art (though the art is bound to help in interpreting the life). But it should be as firm a rule not to look to the art to supply facts that biography has failed to establish. By what criterion can such "evidence" be assessed, or a fine line drawn between fact and fiction? All the more reason, then, to avoid the sort of remarks that Hall drops from time to time, implying that he has tried this wrong approach and failed. For instance: "Mrs. Roper's boarding house in Burton Crescent, where, in *The Small House at Allington*, Johnny Eames gets involved with the the landlady's daughter, may well be modeled on Trollope's lodgings in Northumberland Street"; or "Whether there was ever a Lily Dale in Trollope's early life, a woman he worshiped for years but, for whatever reason, could never win, is beyond discovery"; or "the words [certain words of the narrator in *The Bertrams*] sound too personal, too melancholy to have lacked some basis in experience."

Hall's book abounds in pen portraits of Trollope, all funny and all agreeing fairly closely, for Trollope was the same bustling, hectoring, contumacious fellow in pretty much any social situation. There is one account, by an unspecified friend, that was new to me, and that I like particularly:

> The bell would peal, the knocker begin thundering, the door be burst open, and the next minute the house be filled with the big resonant voice inquiring who was at home. I should say that he had naturally a sweet voice, which through eagerness he had spoilt by halloing. He was a big man, and the most noticeable thing about his dress was a black handkerchief which he wore tied *twice* round his neck. A trick of his was to put the end of a silk pocket handkerchief in his mouth and to keep gnawing at it—often biting it into holes in the excess of energy.

In various ways (some good, some not so good) Trollope seems to have been an intensely impatient man. He was impatient of what he considered cant, and of all useless qualms and self-questionings. When an elderly post office official complained to him that his responsibilities worried him, Trollope churlishly advised him to hire an old woman to do his worrying for him. He was impatient with inefficiency, impatient with needless opposition, impatient with intermediaries—this last being a trait with theological consequences. In a famous theological pronouncement of his about humility, it is quite a task to separate all the different elements: genuine conviction, contempt for others' opinion, and obscure teasing:

> I do not prize humility before God. I can understand that a man should be humble before his brother men, the smallness of whose vision required self-abasement in others: but not that any one should be humble before God. To my God I can be but true, and if I think myself to have done well I cannot but say so.... And I own that I feel that it is impossible that the Lord should damn me, and how can I be humble before God when I tell him that I expect from him eternal bliss as the reward of my life here on earth?

Evidently he is ready, if need be, to argue with God himself, as with any pettifogging superior. Mullen makes Trollope out to be deeply concerned with religion, but I doubt that this can be true of a man who was so entire a stranger to the emotion of awe—a man, moreover, who plainly sees no need at all for a Savior to come between him and the Deity.

Still, if he was no religious genius, Trollope was certainly an acute ethical intellect. His convictions, shallow or deep, were all his own, and often liable to surprise us. Did one expect to find him writing that "one's country has no right to demand everything. There is much that is higher & better & greater than one's country. One is patriotic only because one is too small & weak to be cosmopolitan." He was a Philistine, but so far from being a Podsnap that neither Dickens nor Thackeray could have bettered his deadly picture of the art-loving Englishman abroad:

> Let us go into some church on the Continent—in Italy, we will say—where the walls of the churches still boast of the great works of the great masters. Look at that man standing on the very altar-step while the priest is saying his mass; look at his gray shooting-coat, his thick shoes, his wide-awake hat stuck under one arm, and his stick under the other, while he holds his opera-glass to his eyes. How he shuffles about to get the best point of sight, quite indifferent as to clergy or laity!... [H]e has come here to see that fresco, and see it he will.... Perhaps some servant of the Church ... begs him to step back for just a moment. The lover of art glares at him with insulted look, and hardly deigns to notice him farther; he merely turns his eye to his Murray, puts his hat down on the altar-step, and goes on studying his subject. All the world—German, Frenchman, Italian, Spaniard—all men of all nations know that ugly gray shooting-coat contains an Englishman.

Toward Trollope as an artist it is hard not to have mixed feelings, and the mixture was never so well expressed as by Henry James. How one's spirits rise when reading those early reviews of his of Trollope novels in the *Nation*, with their incredulous rage at the sort of reading-public implied by their success:

> The *Belton Estate* is a *stupid* book ... essentially, organically, consistently stupid; stupid in direct proportion to its strength. It is without a single idea. It is utterly incompetent to the primary functions of a book, of whatever nature, namely—to suggest thought.

"Our great objection," he went on, "is that we seemed to be reading a work written for children." James writes as one puzzled, as others of us are, that he does not dislike Trollope more, confessing that he has long entertained for Trollope "partiality" of which he is rather ashamed:

> Perhaps, indeed, we do wrong to say that we have entertained it. It has rather usurped our hospitality, and has resisted several attempts at forcible expulsion. If it remains, therefore, in however diminished vigor, we confess that it will be through our weakness.

That these words were sincere and not just a facetious flourish—that James did genuinely like Trollope—is proved by his palinode written twenty years later, when the Trollope phenomenon seemed less of a threat and he could afford to be generous. In an obituary article, James expressed wonderment at Trollope's "complete appreciation of the real" and spoke of him as "one of the most trustworthy, though not one of the most eloquent, of the writers who have helped the heart of man to know itself."

If one is right that in Trollope there is a split between a deeper self and a superficial one, then it seems plain that he handed over the plots of his novels to the superficial self. A sense of what Trollope lacks, the deficiency that was so crucial for James, becomes clear in reading a passage near the end of *Phineas Finn*. "How much we would both of us avoid if we could only have another chance!" sighs the unhappy Laura Standish to Phineas. "If I could only be as I was before I persuaded myself to marry a man whom I never loved, what a paradise the earth would be to me! With me

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all regrets are too late." "And with me as much so," replies Phineas. The exchange asks us to look back over the whole novel and brings home how little there is to interest us in its form. The careers of the two speakers have been neatly entangled, in a mechanical fashion, but not in a way—as Austen or Tolstoy would have managed—that means anything or suggests any idea.

The thought seems never to have occurred to Trollope that form and meaning could be synonymous. In creating *The Warden*, his first popular success, he tells us that he had been inspired by two separate thoughts: the evil of diverting charitable endowments from the poor for whom they had been intended, and the "undeserved severity" of the newspapers toward the individuals, perhaps quite innocent, who benefited from the abuse. These thoughts were almost contradictory, and it was with "an absence of all art-judgment in such matters" that he had attempted to combine them in one novel. Actually, though, precisely because it confronts such an ambivalence, one sometimes gets the feeling that *The Warden* was his best novel. It is at least the only one of his that could be said to embody a serious idea.

The strength of Trollope's novels always lies in detail. His acuteness of observation is clearly bound up with that unceasing waking dream in which he "lived with" his characters; but it is also a matter of ethical insight and a delicate sense for discriminations, a trait that sorts oddly with the browbeating, table-thumping character he presented to the world. When, in *Framley Parsonage*, Fanny Robarts, to the annoyance of Mr. Crawley, comes bringing gifts to the illness-stricken Crawley household, Mrs. Crawley defends her husband's acrimonious attitude: "Dear Mrs. Robarts, you must not be surprised at him. His lot is sometimes very hard to bear: such things are so much worse for a man than for a woman." The narrator comments, "Fanny was not quite prepared to admit this in her own heart, but she made no reply on that head." That "not quite" is the sort of quietly restrictive note that Trollope is continually sounding and that helps give his novels their characteristic texture.

But the strength is also a matter of prose. One can easily overlook this, since Trollope was using a style that he was far from having invented (and that Austen used even more brilliantly before him). Moreover, it is an essentially unobtrusive style. It demands the surest possible grasp of conversational idiom and a sense for the mot juste needed to evoke a given social ambience. It is thus a social talent raised to the level of high art, though it also works by very slight and caricatural inflections toward more literary vocabularies. Think, for instance—drawing once again upon *Framley Parsonage*—of this beautifully managed excursion into the mock heroic, exactly designed (as it would not have been in Fielding) to evoke the outlook of a particular character:

> Lady Lufton, with all her high-flown ideas, was not an imprudent woman. She knew that her son had been extravagant, though she did not believe that he had been reckless: and she was well content to think that some balsam from the old bishop's coffers should be made to cure the slight wounds which his early imprudence might have inflicted on the carcass of the family property.

Or consider the following masterly exercise in *style indirect libre*, in which, by permutation in the phrasing of a single idea, the conflicting styles, temperaments, foibles, and vices of half a dozen characters are instantly brought before us. The topic is whether the millionairess but no longer young Miss Dunstable ought to marry Mr. Sowerby, who is witty, clever, good-looking, and a member of Parliament, but penniless and deep in debt:

> The suggestion as regarded Mr. Sowerby was certainly true, and was not the less so as regarded some of Mr. Sowerby's friends. His sister, Mrs. Harold Smith, had devoted herself to the work, and with this view had run up a dear friendship with Miss Dunstable. The bishop had intimated, nodding his head knowingly, that it would be a very good thing. Mrs. Proudie had given in her adherence. Mr. Supplehouse had been made to understand that it must be a case of "Paws off" with him, as long as he remained in that part of the world; and even the duke himself had desired Fothergill to manage it.

Alasdair MacIntyre, in *After Virtue*, has argued that we, his twentieth-century contemporaries, have "very largely" if not "entirely" forgotten what morality is about. We still manipulate the language of morality, but we have quite forgotten, like Dark Age survivors of some nuclear annihilation, the belief system in which it makes sense. Thus it is piquant that Shirley Letwin, another Oakeshottian and neo-Aristotelian, has argued in *The Gentleman in Trollope* exactly the opposite case. According to her, neither St. Paul nor Kant nor Aristotle himself got ethics quite right. We had to wait until the Victorian period, and specifically until the novels of Anthony Trollope, for the true gospel of morality: for the ethic of "virtue without struggle" exemplified in

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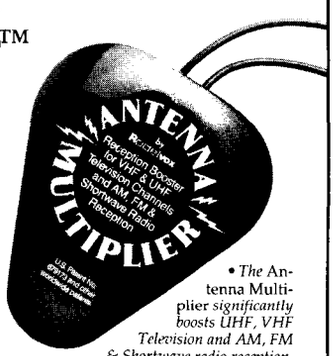

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Trollope's concept of the "gentleman."

For the mistake of all previous ethical systems, argues Letwin, has been to posit universal patterns of moral excellence, and the fatal fruit of this error has been the self-divided man, eternally torn between reason and passion and other such dichotomies. Only the gentleman realizes that no such patterns exist, and that morality must be invented as one goes along, made up by that steady manner of conducting oneself known as "integrity." No rules for integrity can be laid down. We can only come to understand what being a gentleman means by knowing gentlemen and closely observing them "either in life or through reading a novelist like Trollope." ("The most perfect gentleman in Trollope's novels," she adds, lest we jump to the wrong conclusion, "is Madame Max Goesler.")

It is a bold theory, and on one thing at least we can agree with Letwin: that in certain respects Trollope was a profound social thinker. I have in mind his handling of snobbery. It ought not to be forgotten that the very complex concept of snobbery, which ties together how one looks up to people and how one looks down on them (a concept still not altogether comprehended outside Anglo-Saxondom), was the creation of one man, Thackeray. Trollope was a friend of Thackeray's, and he gained a very thorough understanding of this concept, grasping in more unblinking fashion indeed than Thackeray himself the crucial fact that to employ the concept of "snobbery" is to become ipso facto a player in the game of snobbery. He is at his most engaging and clear-headed when demonstrating that he and his reader are snobs like everyone else.

All the same, in reading Letwin's book one is put in mind of James's question in an article on "The Noble School of Fiction": "Who could rest content with this as the last word on religious sagacity: that the ideal for human endeavor is the English gentleman?—unless, indeed, it be the English gentleman himself?" Why it is wrong, as I think it is, to take the Victorian romance about the "gentleman" too seriously entails a look at the logic of the "gentleman." According to Trollope in his *Autobiography*, a man in public life would wreck his career forever if he dared say that posts in the army or navy or civil service ought to be reserved entirely for gentlemen. "He would be defied to define the term—and would fail should he attempt to do so. But he would know what he meant, and so very probably would they who defied him."

The logic of this is not quite what it appears. Its drift is not that everyone knows what a gentleman is and can recognize one, but that every *gentleman* knows what a gentleman is and can recognize one. The consequence is clear and recalls the Calvinist doctrine of election: no amount of observing "gentlemen" is going to teach you anything unless you are one yourself already. Accordingly, Trollope in his novels is not really, in the manner of a courtesy-book or an eighteenth-century novel, offering examples of gentlemanliness for imitation. His aim is rather negative than positive. The real satisfaction offered is not that of acquiring gentlemanliness, for gentlemanliness is indefinable and incommunicable; it is the satisfaction of of enjoying the privilege, only vouchsafed to gentlemen, of saying when someone is *not* one. Occasions for this happen here and there in Trollope's novels, and they are not the novels' happiest moments.

P. N. FURBANK is the author of *E. M. Forster: A Life* (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich) and *Unholy Pleasure: The Idea of Social Class* (Oxford University Press).

Goyz N the Hood

BY NATHAN GLAZER

The Death of an American Jewish Community: A Tragedy of Good Intentions by Hillel Levine and Lawrence Harmon

(Free Press, 370 pp., $24.95)

The Jewish community of Roxbury, Dorchester, and Mattapan, all of them neighborhoods of Boston, was the kind of community that could have been replicated at the time in many other cities in the United States. It was centered on a major shopping street, Blue Hill Avenue, with delicatessens, kosher butchers, synagogues large and small, shops of all sorts, Jewish organizations' headquarters. The population lived in modest quarters around the avenue, mainly in "triple deckers," the distinctive building form of the Boston working class, but also in two-family and single-family homes. The schools were filled with ambitious and diligent students, and young and old paraded in new clothes on Jewish holidays.

These neighborhoods may fairly glow with nostalgia; but whatever gloss one puts on them, whatever the exaggerations of sentimentality about their past, these neighborhoods were certainly very much better than they are today, when the houses are burned out or boarded up, the synagogues abandoned, the storefronts empty, with only a few well-guarded check-cashing agencies or services for the variously afflicted—drug-takers, AIDS patients, juvenile delinquents—occupying some of the old stores that once seemed to host innumerable thriving small businesses. The last supermarkets closed a long time ago. Now Hillel Levine, a Jewish historian, and Lawrence Harmon, the editor of a Brookline newspaper, have written a terribly sad and disheartening book about the last days of these places.

I lived in similar neighborhoods in the East Bronx and the West Bronx, and I visited many similar neighborhoods in other cities when I was active in Avukah, the student Zionist organization, in the early 1940s. The names are different, the details are different; but the stories are so similar that one wonders why one bothers to tell them again. Still, perhaps there was indeed something special about Jewish Boston. I recall that the largest chapter in Avukah in the early 1940s was the Harvard chapter, and all but one of the members of that chapter lived in Roxbury or Dorchester. (That was before the Jews had moved down Blue Hill Avenue to Mattapan, where the last act in the story of "ethnic succession" was played out in the early 1970s.) Only one of sixty members lived on campus. The rest lived at home and commuted to Harvard. Theodore White was one such student, and he tells in his autobiography about visiting the mutilated house and neighborhood of his youth.

There is at least one part of the Boston story, however, that makes it worthy of detailed examination. It is not that the upwardly mobile of Jewish Boston commuted to Harvard rather than to City College, or that the Jews of Boston were more liberal than elsewhere (perhaps they were); it is that in this case one is emboldened to think that the cause, the spring, the hidden works of the process

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that turns lively communities into crime-infested and drug-ridden deserts may at last be found.

In Boston the usual efforts at urban renewal and urban rehabilitation had taken place on an even greater scale than elsewhere, with the usual effects. (A classic book on urban renewal in Boston, Herbert Gans's *The Urban Villagers*, describes the destruction of a largely Italian tenement community, the West End of Boston, by urban renewal in the 1950s.) In Boston, however, an enlightened urban renewal administrator, Hale Champion, and an enlightened mayor, Kevin White, sought to do more in the late 1960s to provide good housing and good communities for a rising black population. Their instrument was B-BURG, the Boston Banks Urban Renewal Group, which used new and creative FHA programs to encourage home ownership for the poor. The FHA would guarantee and subsidize mortgages that the banks would offer. Home ownership would come with all its benefits—not only capital-value increase for the homeowners, but the enlistment of their energy and pride in maintaining their property, and the mobilization of their self-interest in maintaining a community in which the value of their home would increase.

What could go wrong? Money would be poured into an old neighborhood, the vigorous young would add their energies in maintaining a neighborhood that consisted increasingly of the elderly poor, private and public money would work together, private and public agencies would each do what they knew best. But still it was a disaster.

In this story of good intentions gone astray, there are a number of possible villains. To the bankers, for example,

> FHA-insured mortgages were a mixed blessing. Regardless of the race of the recipient ... the very utterance of FHA was associated with a greater risk of foreclosures and abandonment.... It was simple human nature. With the government assuming the risk, screening standards always seemed to diminish.... B-BURG banks would be damned if they were going to accept tiny down payments (at most 3 percent) and throw themselves open to a depositor's revolt in their suburban branches.

So the most forward of the bankers drew a line (to limit their exposure? to mollify the suburbs?) and said that only there, in the demarcated area, would the banks offer mortgages to aspiring black homeowners. Here was a case, then, in which the red line indicated where blacks would be welcome, not where they wouldn't be; where they could receive mortgages, not where they could not. One might call this "positive" discrimination. What could be wrong with that? In fact, it is not really clear what was wrong with it, if one adds nothing more.

But the demarcation encompassed the old Jewish community of Boston, and carefully left out the Italians and the Irish. "Almost two decades after drawing a red line on a wall map in order to establish the loan boundaries for the B-BURG consortium, [the banker Carl] Ericson said he had no knowledge at the time that he had essentially walled off the city's Jewish community." Perhaps the bankers (or the brokers) knew that there would be hell to pay if Italian and Irish neighborhoods were marked for the program. They were right; there would have been. Is there any harm in taking the path of least resistance to create new housing opportunities for blacks and new integrated communities by aiming at the liberal Jewish community? But Levine and Harmon suggest that it was more than that: Jewish homeowners had paid off their mortgages, and there was no business or profit for banks in the Jewish neighborhoods. (Surely the same was true about the aging Irish and Italian neighborhoods.)

Whatever the case, this socially-minded action by the banks is looked on with some suspicion by the authors, with much more by all the others involved in the tragedy—Jews and blacks, Jewish and black civic organizations. There is less ambiguity, however, in judging the actions of the real-estate brokers and the FHA assessors. The brokers simply engaged in a riot of block-busting. "The blacks are coming, sell out, now, fast." But are brokers really needed to deliver such a message? The homeowners knew well enough what had happened up the avenue, further north in Roxbury.

Actually criminal in its behavior was the FHA staff, or some members of it: "According to a civil suit filed in 1971 by the Justice Department, [the head appraiser for the FHA in Boston] ... 'blatantly engineered' the appraisals in order to enrich himself and members of his family by almost $350,000." His son or another relative would buy a house at a low price. The house was then appraised at being worth much more than it was. The bank would then offer a higher mortgage, the seller would reap a higher profit, and the purchaser would be saddled with higher interest. If, into the bargain, the house needed major repairs that were not noted, the new homeowner would find that he simply could not maintain the house and pay the interest on the mortgage. Deterioration of the property, abandonment, and foreclosure would follow.

So we have three plausible villains. But there were more: the bigwigs of the Jewish community. They had themselves moved west to Brookline and Newton in the 1950s, and had arranged to move their institutions out of Roxbury into the areas of expanding Jewish population. They took with them, in other words, the institutions that might have still flourished for a time in their old locations. The upscale Jews did not empathize with elderly Jews in the old neighborhoods who wanted to live out their last days in walking distance from the synagogue. It was only later, when the assault on the

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elderly by local criminals became unbearable—when their houses were broken into, they were mugged on the streets, and some were killed in their apartments—that the organized Jewish community set up a service to make it easier for them to leave. The story that Levine and Harmon tell leaves a stain on the Boston Jewish community, too.

Bankers, brokers, assessors, community leaders ... but the moving force, the one that led to real hysteria, was crime. It is not easy, in a systematic analysis, to integrate criminals with bankers, brokers, assessors, and community leaders; but criminals, it would appear from this book, were the shock troops that drove the Jews pell-mell, in an amazingly short time, out of Mattapan, and left a ravaged community behind.

Many of the blacks and the Jews profiled in this book sincerely looked forward to an integrated community in these neighborhoods. One radical community organizer in a nearby area claims that it could have been accomplished. But what would have been involved? Closer scrutiny of incoming black families? A calculated effort to find white buyers for property put on sale to maintain the integrated community? Preference for better-off black purchasers? Special funds to permit purchasers to maintain and repair their houses? Special agencies to advise them on home-purchasing and maintenance? Pressure on city government to maintain services?

A very long list of actions and services was required, and some of them were available. But all this would have been hardly enough. For the remaining population was terror-stricken. The most vigorous defenders of integration, according to this account, were themselves, in a very short time, to be subjected to particularly horrifying crimes, as their homes were looted and they themselves suffered physical assault and sometimes murder. A young rabbi had acid thrown into his face as he opened his door to two black attackers, who demanded that he "lead the Jewish racists out of Mattapan." Synagogues were a particular target of arson.

Urban analysts have never known what to do with criminals as an active force in urban decline. In the 1970s, while the South Bronx (an area five times larger than the area whose decay is chronicled here) burned and was abandoned, we saw ingenious efforts to indict the landlords, the insurance companies, the city, the fire department, the banks—all of whom undoubtedly bore some responsibility. Still, if one reads Jill Jonnes's *We're Still Here*, a fine account of the destruction of the South Bronx, it is clear that the active element, the powerful proximate cause of the decline, was crime, which induced a fear for property, children, wives, lives that drove out all the people who could manage to get out. Without crime, one can envisage neighborhoods getting poorer and somewhat shabbier as the population changes; one can envisage even a lengthy period of integrated black-white residency. But when crime soars, the process of adaptation is impossible, and "ethnic succession" becomes a horror story that gives the lie to such bland sociological terms. An increase in crime, or a heightened perception of danger, is not inevitable when one ethnic group replaces another in a neighborhood. Had the new residents been predominantly Vietnamese or Haitian, matters might have been different. But for reasons that would take us far afield, a high level of criminal behavior is frequently associated with low-income American blacks. In any event, as a consequence of crime, the resident population fled.

Many things will stand out in the reader's mind from this well-told and well-researched story. Particularly poignant is the fate of Temple Mishkan Tefila, a large porticoed and columned synagogue on Franklin Park, off Blue Hill Avenue. In the 1950s the synagogue moved west to a new site in Newton. As is not uncommon, the grand old building was sold to the Lubavitcher Hasidim as a Jewish school; the Lubavitchers, as we know from Crown Heights in Brooklyn, are prepared to stay in the inner city. By 1967, however, even they were ready to go.

A liberal Jewish lawyer thought he saw a great opportunity for a new home for Elma Lewis's Afro-American cultural center. But Lewis wouldn't pay for it, and neither would the black community. After Martin Luther King's assassination, "Boston's Jewish leaders were convinced that a sweeping gesture of goodwill would be necessary to keep the peace between Jews and blacks in Boston." What better gesture than to turn over Mishkan Tefila to Lewis for her school and center? This involved raising enough money to buy out the Lubavitchers, but there was still a $25,000 mortgage on the property. Would Lewis take some responsibility for it? I do not know how Levine and Harmon have her words, but they report her as saying this: "You're asking us for money?... [T]he greatest black leader in America was just gunned down by a filthy racist and you're asking us for money. Your people turned and ran from this neighborhood.... You owe us this building.... And we're not paying a dime."

And so at a widely publicized ceremony, which it was hoped would lead to goodwill, the building was turned over. And this is what happened:

> As the parties prepared to sign the transfer agreement, Lewis's attorney [Larry Shubow, the liberal Jewish lawyer] suggested to her that she present Grossman [a Jewish community leader] with one dollar to symbolize the legally binding nature of the transaction. Lewis made a show of searching her bag for the bill.... "I haven't got a cent on me," she told Shubow, smiling broadly. Bernard Grossman then reached into his billfold for a dollar and handed it to Lewis, who in turn handed it back, raising a round of good-natured chuckles and guffaws from the assembled.

A photograph in the book shows Temple Mishkan Tefila, in its glory, in 1925. Another photograph shows it in 1989. It looks abandoned.

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Cul-de-sac

—after Robbe-Grillet

No more rain down this dead end.
Sunlight, sudden and cramped,
as if spliced into the morning,
every wart and node and groove
of tree bark raised in relief.
Even the twos and threes of trashbags
struck by foils of light,
trashbags queued up like kids
waiting for the schoolbus.
The light has already made its entrance
into the bedroom,
casting silhouettes of branches
and stems across the wall and ceiling.
Moreover, on the wall are oblong whorls,
trembling,
the result of a few air bubbles
floating forever in the panes.
The long morning shadows draw back
beneath the cars,
the blocklong shadow of the oak
is sucked back into the tree.
There will be no more rain today.
Just the scrape of invisible planes.
There will be no more sun.
Just the revelation that the slow breathing
steadying the room is not quite my own.

TONY SANDERS

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Naked City

BY CHRISTINE STANSELL

Low Life: Lures and Snares of Old New York by Luc Sante

(Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 414 pp., $27.50)

Books about the exotic "lowlife" of the great cities of the West date back to the early nineteenth century, when enterprising journalists in London, New York, and Paris began to publish typologies of the people they encountered as they ventured into the poor sides of the town. These volumes turned on the notion of a metropolis divided, one side thriving in the sunlight of bourgeois respectability, the other sunk in the darkness of crime and despair—a trope that became central to Victorian social reportage and fiction. Poe, Dickens, and innumerable authors of charity reports created gentlemen narrators who traveled back and forth across the border. By the late nineteenth century, male writers' accounts of their supposedly perilous journeys through the slums—*Outcast London, Sunlight and Shadows of New York Life*, Jacob Riis's *How the Other Half Lives*—were so common as to constitute a distinct genre of urban literature, infused with a spirit of bravado, voyeurism, and inchoate ethnography similar to that which informed books about steaming up the Congo.

It is odd to see this profoundly Victorian form of social description, ridden with moralism, class condescension, and titillation, revived inadvertently by such a sophisticated writer as Luc Sante. To be sure, Sante's journey into the past is different from the Victorians' exploration of their own present. While the gentlemen narrators of the nineteenth century cast their fascination with the "evils" of the poor within a language of urban reform, Sante evokes these same "evils" in the service of memory and even a curious sort of celebration. It is with the drifters, pimps, prostitutes, street kids, con artists, and hustlers, "the unresting souls of the poor," that he believes the spirit of New York rests, a source of regenerative myth for a once-great city now tired and worn.

And Sante's own persona as a writer is not the scandalized bourgeois of the genteel tradition. It is rather the dark-minded flaneur—like Baudelaire on the boulevards, like the beats in Times Square—who seeks a perverse liberation among the poor and the criminal. Still, the notion of "lowlife" on which the book is constructed, by promoting the old sensationalism of the dangerous poor, works to circumscribe Sante's more ironic, skeptical, and democratic ventures. His attempt to fashion a bohemian, hip mythology out of materials permeated with a Victorian exoticism of the "low" remains uneasy and somewhat confused.

Sante's New York is downtown Manhattan, first staked out in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, where the angling streets and the damp vacant lots can still recall, to those in the know, the back alleys and the fetid ponds of the old Anglo-Dutch seaport. In lower Manhattan, certain places "seem consigned to eternal repetition of poverty and low life and carnival traffic." Human history is mired in an old, old geography. The stinking dump of a colonial tannery, long since filled in and forgotten, bequeaths an enduring stigma: now a seedy housing project stands on the spot. "Such is the work of the city's ghosts," Sante declares. Forget those images of New York as skyline, the gleaming fictions of modernity, and keep walking downtown, he urges, until the rational blocks of grid streets end, and you drift into the *real* New York, the repository of the city's unconscious. There, along the long blocks of tenements and the trashy sweep of the Bowery, "the marginal, the dispossessed, the depraved, the defective, the recalcitrant" endlessly revivify a saga of "vice and crime, misery and graft, panic and despair, chaos and saturnalia."

Sante's devotion to New York emerges clearly in his passion for the physical remains of the old city. Indeed, he cuts his most appealing authorial figure in the book not as the flaneur or the urban explorer, but as an amateur historian who has been seized by the same love of place that inspires history buffs in small New England towns to trace the lineage of old houses. Like many local historians, he is a demonical researcher (the old photographs that he has dug up, many from the tombs of the police archives, are a marvel; they alone are worth the price of the book), and his mastery of detail makes the opening chapters on Manhattan's landscape his strongest.

Sante is a gifted writer about architecture and urban space. Here, his compilation of the historical minutiae of the phenomenally concentrated and eclectic Manhattan landscape—the tangling of overhead lines and wires at the turn of the century, the layering of advertising from billboards down to sandwich men, the aggressive profusion of ornamentation in cast-iron, brick, and stone—gives sharpness and brilliance to his sense of New York's physicality. He takes the time, for example, to peer closely at the tenements, "those great and wretched palimpsests," in his lovely phrase. An odd sweetness tinges such passages, deepening his moral and aesthetic voice. He deciphers the dreams and the economies that went into a poignantly embellished tenement facade, notes the waning of the decorative impulse as one steps into the tiled vestibule, and then carefully measures its attenuation as you move inside and up the stairs into that "frail and wretched thing of kitchens and urinals." Such careful readings give historical and emotional significance to buildings that seem impervious to all but abstract sociologisms about poverty, class, and housing.

While Sante's meditations on New York as place reach toward the mythic, reminding us of the glories and the calamities of human inventiveness that abide in even the shabbiest corners of the city, he doesn't take the same pains with his tales of "the unresting souls of the poor." The heart of his book is a series of stories loosely strung together, structured solely around the notion of "lowlife," about poor people and their exploits. He tells us about the Chinese gangs who brought opium to New York, explicates the tricks of the faro dealers and prize-fight fixers, and chronicles the pitched street battles of the Dead Rabbit and Bowery Boy gangs. The structure is taxonomic rather than analytical; oddities are grouped together in a cabinet-of-curiosities arrangement.

The stories that he recounts are mostly based in fact, but there is none of the moral, historical, or psychological interrogation that would make them resonate. Madame Restall was indeed a

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famous abortionist in the mid-nineteenth century who practiced openly at a prime downtown location; and Victorian brothels sometimes did employ pubescent and even prepubescent girls; and there have been violent (although not murderous) gangs of young men in the city for a long time; and the police were without question involved routinely in gambling, prostitution, and fencing operations. Yet Sante makes such stories live only as sensations and melodrama.

These concerted rhetorical efforts to elicit frissons of shock and terror are ill suited to readers who routinely encounter unspeakably worse horrors in their morning papers. And the compulsion to sensationalize undercuts Sante's civic passions; in place of desire and tragedy it serves up cartoon of urban "types." Whitman and Dreiser might have taught the flaneur about a more lasting imaginative empathy. Sante sets out to deploy the term "lowlife" ironically with downtown chutzpah, but he ends up using it with the tone of an out-of-towner's jeer. Are the residents of tenements, homeless children, working-class drinkers, or prostitutes really "lowlifes"? True, there have always lived in New York certain people who by the estimation of the law, their neighbors, their own families, and probably themselves, too, were lowlifes—professional criminals, pimps, child molesters, rapists, exploiters of child labor, for example. But Sante's need to amass lurid oddities takes him far afield from these socially identifiable types, so far afield that he risks turning the entirety of nineteenth-century working-class New York into Skid Row.

Take the Bowery, where he kicks off his revels through the downtown mud. Until the end of the nineteenth century, the Bowery was New York's chief working-class promenade and shopping street. It also gave rise to what was long the city's (and the country's) most vital and innovative entertainment district: over time there flourished German beer gardens, dime museums of curiosities (jars of pickled manatees, lantern slides of deformed syphilitics, and so on), minstrel shows, melodramas, the foreign-language theaters, vaudeville, and the first nickelodeons. While the Bowery crowds were predominantly working class, middle-class New Yorkers certainly patronized the theaters.

The singularity of the avenue, in fact, lay in its subversion of the sunlight-and-shadows dichotomy, its mixing of immigrants and the native-born, working- and middle-class, and men and women (if not blacks and whites). It seems like a place that might interest Sante, who is a shrewd critic of downtown entertainment today. In fact he does linger in the book on the Bowery as an axis of urban culture, the dark twin of respectable Broadway to the west. But to what effect? In Sante's description, an odor of sleaze pervades the avenue. He peppers his account with allusions to dives, pimps, "whores," and "freaks." Yet if the Bowery was chiefly a breeding ground for depravity, a cultural bog of imbecilic pleasures, what are we to make of the stunning émigré actress Nazimova, who installed her Russian theater troupe there, or the thousands of immigrants who flocked, yes, to ogle the dead manatees, but also to see Shakespeare in Yiddish?

This is not to argue there was no "lowlife" in New York. Yet how porous and how ambiguous the community of Manhattan's roughest and raunchiest has been. Long before the days of Times Square, writers, producers, saloon-keepers, and street people learned to make money from catering to the fantasies of sexual transgression and crime that New York evoked in the imaginations of outsiders. Lowlife was what outsiders expected of New York, and lowlife was what New York gave them.

Many of Sante's seamiest examples should be understood in the context of this artifice. "Suicide Hall," a Lower East Side sailors' hangout and male tourist trap, traded on its reputation as a place where down-and-out prostitutes supposedly killed themselves. Elsewhere, late Victorian proprietors learned to deliver the shivers to visitors with thinly veiled references to knockout drops and murder, and with gambling operations in back rooms. Sante is aware of the problem of authenticity, attempting to resolve the paradox with a distinction between "sham vice" and "real vice." But he drastically underplays the issue, and occasionally misjudges what's real and what's not. "Real vice," he insists, existed at such places as the Hester Street dive where "murder was an everyday occurrence ... if we are to believe contemporary descriptions." But the contemporary descriptions are precisely what are *not* to be believed.

New Yorkers have also exported lowlife to the rest of the country. The dialectic between life on the New York streets and New Yorkers' own renditions of that life has been a central dynamic in American popular culture. Over time, these images became, as Sante nicely puts it in another context, "more New York than New York ... New York redoubled." Hollywood, of course, seized on the formula, and exploits it to this day. So if uptown life was swinging and gliding through the posh apartments and the banqueted restaurants in a romantic comedy, downtown life was exchanging snappy one-liners with the bartenders in a gangster movie, rubbing elbows with murderers, prizefighters, and gun molls (or now, drug lords).

And yet the movies couldn't have done their work of verisimilitude without the theatrical labors of working-class New Yorkers like Chuck Connors, who as the self-styled "king of the Bowery" reigned over a saloon where journalists, tourists, and political radicals came to drink with the hoi polloi. With an argot compressed from the loose slang of his neighborhood, Connors tickled the admiring crowds with pungent social observations, folksy humor, and a racy dialect that advertised its distance from middle-class life. If he were a rich man, for example: "I'd call up me Chat'am Square agent an' tell him ter give cologne ter der gals an' segars an' free lunch ter der gorillas. Ev'ry bloke dat wuz hungry would have a feed bag an w'enever he wanted it. How does dat grab yer?" It was in part such vernacular performance artists and entrepreneurs who, with the help of local journalists, packaged New York lowlife into dialect and fashion so that it could be shipped to the West Coast.

Sante has a strong sense of the city as theater, and so it is unfortunate that he misses the ways in which his "lowlifes" and their publicists were creating a drama of moral squalor that in its very luridness was distinct from a far grayer and more banal history of crime and moral delinquency. "New York," he writes memorably, "a city stingy with plazas and low on boulevards, built in piecemeal clumps rather than around a core, almost seems to have been designed to erase the distinction between spectator and spectacle, the only real separation being between the fixed and the mobile." When Sante throws in his lot with the mobile, looking at the urban poor with the democratic appreciation of the Whitmanian walker in the city, he writes with inspiration and wisdom. But when he stops and joins the gawking crowd, he becomes himself a tourist of the past.

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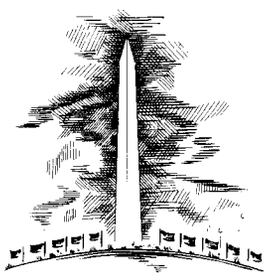
WASHINGTON DIARIST

Pat and Mike

WHAT FOLLOWS IS INBRED, INTRAcecine, "inside-the-Beltway," shulpolitical, trivial under the aspect even of time, for the prurient and the vicarious (that is, for groupies, junkies, and press critics) only; but I fear that my friend Michael Kinsley has lost his mind. I refer to his stubborn and spirited defense of Patrick Buchanan, reiterated in these pages last week, against the charge, which is sufficiently proved to me, that Buchanan is anti-Semitic. (Yes, the Jews again; even I'm getting a little weary of this.) It has been said that Kinsley's apologetics are owed to "a conflict of interest," since he does the dark and lonely work of appearing with Buchanan on a cable television program. I do not doubt that there is a grain of truth to this charge. It is impossible to think about a colleague or a friend without understanding, and therefore forgiving, too much; and Kinsley, contrary to a common impression, does not have a heart of stone. Still, I believe that what we have here is not a conflict of interest, but only (as the local lawyers say) the appearance of a conflict of interest, since Kinsley has always been distinguished by an interest in the appearance of conflict, and is a startlingly honest man. Kinsley is saying these grotesque things about Buchanan because he thinks that they are true. That is what alarms me.

BUCHANAN, I SHOULD SAY IMMEdiately, strikes me as a perfect horror, a standard-issue peddler of resentment and the fear of modernity, a nostalgist dissolved in anger, a parochial man the magnitude of whose aggression is the exact measure of the magnitude of his anxiety, an American Afrikaner, the first v[illegible]o Poujadiste, a passing stain on a pluralistic society in troubled but typical transition; and if he hurts George Bush and the Republican Party before he passes, then he will have done Yahweh's work. Buchanan speaks moistly about "certainties," but he gives certainty a bad name. Prejudice is his public and political signature. I would have been surprised to learn that he did *not* have a prejudice against the Jews. Why should we be any different? (That is not, of course, the only reason, or the most significant reason, for my belief that he is anti-Semitic. I have read, for my sins, a great deal of what he has written, and I am summarizing.)

KINSLEY OFFERS TWO ARGUMENTS to the contrary. First, he insists that such an indictment "tar[s] someone like Buchanan with the same brush as David Duke and Adolf Hitler." Now, I want to be perfectly clear: Patrick Buchanan is not like Adolf Hitler. Neither, for that matter, is David Duke. Adolf Hitler was extremely distinguished in his field. He set a high standard. It would be, as I was taught to say, a posthumous victory for Hitler to make him the standard by which anti-Semitism is measured. By such a standard, indeed, all prejudice would escape judgment until it killed, or killed big. And there is a difference, too, between Duke and Buchanan. Duke takes his distance from Hitler as a reason to try harder. Buchanan—well, it was his good luck that Germany was on the other side.



ON THE SUBJECT OF HITLER AND the Holocaust, Buchanan has been consistently contemptible. This is not merely what Kinsley calls an "eccentric passion for accused Nazis." In the matter of the Nazis, Buchanan has always placed the onus of historical proof and moral justification on the Jews. One of his many extraordinary achievements has been to introduce elements of "Holocaust revisionism," and certainly its spirit, into American public life. I do not grasp how Kinsley does not simply recoil from him on this score. And it is cheap of Kinsley, and a bit Buchananish, to call the new evidence about John Demjanjuk "irksome." Irksome to whom? If the man is not "Ivan the Terrible," he will go free. But he is not exactly Dreyfus; he was, it has been established beyond any doubt, a brutal guard in a concentration camp—Ivan the Not So Terrible. And if he is still alive, it is because the Israelis do not have a Buchananish hunger for the death penalty.

THEN KINSLEY ARGUES THAT "IN his heart, he [Buchanan] doesn't think he is an anti-Semite." This is sweet. It is also a complete misunderstanding of the nature of prejudice. For it is only rarely that prejudice is aware of itself, that it admits to itself, that it reflects on itself, that it raises itself to the level of ideology. Most of those who hate blacks, women, gays, Jews, or Muslims would deny that they hate them, and they would not exactly be lying. Their sincerity proves nothing. Kinsley is struck by the pleasantness of his own experience of Buchanan, who has been "genuinely friendly and gracious. As a Jew, I never felt any hostility from Buchanan on that score, never heard him make a disparaging remark about Jews, never noticed any difference in the way he treats Jews and non-Jews." This is intellectually shabby. The evidence of one's own experience is always ridiculously limited, always in desperate need of correcting and thickening. But that is not all. I'll spare Kinsley the Sartre, but the coexistence of prejudice with pleasantness is an old story. Bigots often adore children and dogs. They, too, are human beings—which is precisely why they offend. Jews, certainly, are not unacquainted with the contradiction between private kindness and political cruelty. The history of medieval religious anti-Semitism and modern political anti-Semitism is lousy with individual decencies; but they only make the story sadder.

THERE IS SOMETHING CASUISTIC and awkwardly clever about Kinsley's tone, a misplaced confidence in the empyrean of arguments and counterarguments in which he lives and works. For these are not, like capital gains and health care, rational matters. They are, quite the contrary, the politics of unreason, and it is the almost sacred duty of rational people to recognize how unreason works, if they, the rational ones, want to matter. Sometimes Kinsley knows this. In a powerful column in November 1988, he explained why, contrary to the protestations of the Bush campaign, "Willie Hortonism is, in fact, racist": "As with campaign demagoguery in general, you can't open up Pandora's Box and then express sincere indignation when you get blamed for what pops out.... People who play recklessly with powerful symbols ... shouldn't react with hurt innocence if their symbolism runs away with itself." Of course, the difference between Bush and Buchanan, as Buchanan is reminding the citizens of New Hampshire, is that Bush does not believe in his symbols and Buchanan does. For this reason he, I mean Buchanan, is a wonderful enemy to have. So don't fall for that early evening smile, Michael. He holds his cross. Don't hold your fire.

LEON WIESELTIER

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